On the Mandarin Road

Roland Dorgelès

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On the
MANDARIN ROAD

KHAI-DINH SEATED IN STATE ON THE GOLDEN THRONE OF ANNAM

On the MANDARIN ROAD

BY

ROLAND DORGELÈS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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ON THE MANDARIN ROAD

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CHAPTER I

M. RENAN IN THE NATIVE QUARTER

IT was at Hanoi, amid the pleasing tumult of the native quarter.

Silk Street, with its multicolored scarfs, Street of the Tinsmiths, sonorous with the sound of hammers, Street of Medicines, perfumed with aromatic herbs, Street of the Potters, Street of Scales, Dyers' Street, each has its covered stalls and its diminutive workshops. Here are booths stuffed with those crudely painted animals carried in processions and offered to the spirits; there are little shops with piles of somber Tongkingese furniture, carved in hard wood; elsewhere appears nothing but fans; farther on are only the counters of the money-changers; then come cotton, sugar, lacquer-ware, each possessing its own special street, a name for every trade. The mer-

chant quarter of old China, adapted to present-day taste, is an anachronistic topsyturvydom of bicycles and rickshaws, the imperious bell of trolly-car answering to bell of soup-vender, Annamites in coats, barefoot motormen, Chinese minus pigtails, sellers of phonographs, vagrant astrologers, and, planted at the edge of the sidewalk, a poor woman making *lays,* or bows, before a small shrine. More than anything else, I loved this quarter, so intensely alive. I returned to it day after day, amusing myself bargaining for embroideries, for which I had no use, or hideous inlaid trays. It was my sole pleasure, in this slightly self-conscious Hanoi.

So it was that I was sauntering along on one particular morning, as on many that had preceded. I made my way from the charming Street of Cups to the Street of Sails, where the Chinese restaurants are, but no shop-front held me, no display succeeded in distracting me. Not even the little fruit-seller and her rich pyramids of green oranges and papayas, not even the public scribe, who ought to write only to the gods, with those beautiful colored papers and those mysterious signs he makes. Disillusioned, I was walking along under my white helmet, chewing my disappointment like a bitter stem.

AN ANNAMITE POTTERY SCULPTOR AT HANOI BUSILY ENGAGED IN PUTTING ON THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Is it somewhat absurd? I was thinking of Renan. Yes, Renan, M. Renan, as Bonnat painted him, sitting in an arm-chair, in a black frock-coat, looking rather as if he were asleep, with his carefully kept hands resting quietly in his lap.

Is it possible to think of Renan in the confusion of the rice market? And why, in Heaven's name?

There is an anecdote that may be remembered of a journalist who came to interview the great man one afternoon, with the object of asking him —reporters have those caprices—which, in his opinion, was the most beautiful landscape in the world. The old master had lived through similar interviews. He was not taken by surprise. He closed his eyes to reflect a moment; then, I have no doubt in a honeyed voice, began to dictate: "I remember a sunburned hill commanding, on one side, a smiling landscape of little groves and orchards; on the other, a melancholy sea bristling with rocks. The offshore breeze was warm and scented. The wind from the sea was cutting and tempestuous. Taking refuge in the shade of a great tree, one felt that here one saw both sides of the world."

The journalist made notes, pleased at the way things were turning out. When the master had finished, he asked: "But in what country was it

that you came upon this ravishing spot? Was it in your native Brittany, in Syria, in Greece?"

The old master shook his head. "No," he sighed, perhaps a little ironically. "I never saw it. It exists in my mind."

Ah, what a charming, deceptive tale! But is it so astonishing that the most beautiful landscape in the world should lie hidden in the dreamy soul of the pilgrim of the Acropolis, of the black-garbed wanderer on the barren wastes of Tregor, of the heart-burdened stranger on the plains of Judea?

For my part, I am not at all surprised, and, without being Renan, I have none the less often asked myself—before the ugly block of houses that greeted me at Naples, on the Jurançon Road to which the childhood of King Henry drew me more than the wine, at the foot of Monte Carlo from which I first caught sight of the princely buildings and terraces rising. one above another, before the reservoirs of Suez sprouting on the confines of the desert like huge toadstools of sheet-iron—yes, more than once, I have wondered if the most beautiful places in the world were not those that we forever dream about but never draw near to; if, after all, reality serves any use except to

spoil the marvelous panoramas painted by our fancy, for ourselves alone.

Gluttons tell you that any happiness ungrasped is but an empty dream. Very likely; wisdom so confirms. But often, too, the happiness that the hand seizes upon turns out disillusionment. When you have dreamed for years of the Mandarin Road, the very name of which evokes all the splendors of the Orient, it is not surprising that you experience a flash of annoyance if you are suddenly held up at a corner, between a street-car and an autobus, by some numskull who triumphantly announces, with the idea that he is delighting you:

"Well, there it is, your Mandarin Road!"

And then he shows you a guide-post with a blue sign, executed in the purest style of the Department of Bridges and Highways, whereon you read simply, "Colonial Road No. 1." There you stand a moment, staring, arms hanging loose, just a little ridiculous, with a bitter curl at the corners of your mouth.

So this was the road of my dreams, of my beautiful, immobile journeys, nothing but this: a wide, badly paved highway, skirting the railroad!

And that is why, all out of humor, ignoring the

blind beggar who ran after me, holding out the vast begging-bowl of his peaked hat, I retraced my steps toward the Petit Lac, thinking of M. Renan.

I felt cross with the Mandarin Road. I had a grudge against it. Deliberately I turned my back on it.

I have traversed the delta in every direction, the sad, clay-colored Tongking Delta, with its poverty-sticken, thatched hovels, its swarms of pot-bellied youngsters, its creaking "cholera carts," its countless temples with uptilted roofs, buffaloes, black pigs, herons on the wing, and a whole population laboring in the rice-fields or hurrying along the dikes, a bamboo pole across the shoulder, with two balanced loads. (A mother sometimes carries a child at one end, and a little pig at the other, so that you cannot help wondering whether it is the youngster that has been brought along as a balance or the little pig.) Everywhere on the rivers, on the ponds, you fancy you are seeing the "Poor Fisherman" of Puvis de Chavannes, standing out against a lusterless sky. And the thin bamboo frame supporting the net makes you think of some fantastic water-spider.

A TIME-RAVAGED, HARD-WORKING PEASANT WOMAN OF TONGKING

Where does the earth begin? Where does the inundation end? The rice-fields are like great submerged wheat-fields. Men and women, wallowing in the ooze, trousers tucked well up, are transplanting the young shoots. And I stand looking on in utter astonishment at the thankless task of this laborer who, waist-deep in water, obstinately insists on harrowing a pond.

Two thin Annamites on a narrow dike, alternately pulling and releasing the opposite ends of a rope, rhythmically swing a wicker bucket as they lift the water up from a low-lying field. Another one, whom fate has condemned to hard labor, turns a wheel with his bare feet, setting a chain of buckets in motion. Only, as protection against the sun, he holds in one hand an open umbrella and thinks he is a mandarin. Objects, people, clothing, earth, water, everything, is of the same dark brown, the color of *cu-nao,* the vegetable dye in which the *nhaques,* or peasants, dip their clothes. All lower Tongking wears the same livery of poverty. To the right and to the left, beyond the limit of vision, rice-fields mirror the sun and wound the eyes. No color gladdens the depressing landscape except blue patches of *loc-binh,* the Japanese hyacinths planted by the Annamites to celebrate the Asiatic victory of

Tsushima. Later on, to punish these hotheads, the weed gradually spread over their ponds and obstructed their streams, and they have been helpless to resist the disastrous invasion of flowers.

The villagers are washing rice, clothes, buffaloes, everything that is washable, in the community pond. And from the same source they fetch water for their cooking-pots.

Coolies, coolies, a steady stream of them—on this road! It scarcely seems possible that this is an ordinary day; one expects to come upon a prodigious enterprise of some kind, a loading of one knows not what, or to stumble upon a market. Not at all. They hurry along like ants. Rice-cultivation is difficult; there are hungry mouths to feed. The Tongkingese simply never rests.

I am not drawn by the secret of the temples everywhere to be encountered, either under the flamboyant-trees, in spring glowing with ruby flowers, or hiding in bamboo groves. It is not the thousand-year-old past of this fallen people with which I am concerned, but the real secret, the living secret of these *pauvres Jacques,* with their slant eyes, who jog along barefoot and shy at the automobile spinning past. As we constantly come upon them, squatting comically on the ground, busy talking or calling back and forth be-

tween dike and rice-field, I lean over, full of curiosity, to ask my guide what they are saying. Docilely my friend translates. The conversations are as commonplace as those the peasants at home might hold: Nham's crop is going to be good, Kien's buffalo is sick; or else a young man chaffs a girl, transplanting rice, her dress filled with the green shoots; or perhaps, beside the family *cainha,* smiling with all his black teeth, he offers her a quid of betel. "It is while chewing betel that the heart is told," says the old Annamite song. And the girl, to hide her emotion, shoots long streams of scarlet saliva in every direction.

Credulous past belief are these poor *nhaques,* yet not without guile. One, by his bows, succeeds in getting us to follow him to his little pottery. He calls gaily to his neighbor, assuming that we do no understand: "What do you think! I've made another twenty sous!" (Nobody counts in sapeks any more except in books.)

Here are others, dressed in beautiful flowing black gowns with turbans folded above their foreheads, going up to one of those doorless and roofless pagodas which the smaller villages dedicate to their local gods. They first bow before the tiger at the entrance, a tiger with flaming eyes

carved upon a stone screen; then they deposit their offerings on the altar—red paper horses, a cardboard gourd containing incense-sticks, gilded paper ingots, votive pictures.

We are attracted by strange music of flute, cymbals, and a tambourine to a house where people are wailing in shrill tones. A family is praying at the bedside of a sick person, whose body continues to swell; even mud poultices have failed to cure her ailment. Poor victim! This concert has been going on since the previous evening. I ask myself which will give out first, the musicians, the sick woman, or grief. Fire-crackers have been procured, to frighten away the evil spirits. In case these do not work, handfuls of paper piasters will be scattered about; then the covetous devils will rush out of the body of the sick woman to pounce upon the money, and she will be cured.

How stupid they are, the gods that are not ours!

I remember Ninh-giang and its sampans with their patched sails, Hadong and its coffin-shops, Hai-duong and its fishermen, Kwang-yen with its extended mountain like a sleeping woman, the Paper Village, where half-naked men trample the pulp in enormous vats, Haiphong, abominable sub-prefectual station, squatting on the mud. And there were also Thai-binh, swarming with people,

TONGKINGESE HARROWING A RICE-FIELD WITH WATER-BUFFALOES BEFORE TRANSPLANTING THE SHOOTS

Bac-ninh and its embroiderers, Tho-ha and its potters, and those curious floating villages of the Red River, with their thatched dwellings resting on bamboo framework. All have their communal house, their temple, their inn for the boatmen; and before the *cainha* of the less poor is a strip of garden so narrow that there a sow nursing her piglets seems to be giving nourishment at the same time to the ugly yellow dog and the children pressed against her dugs in an indiscriminate heap of warm flesh.

Here or there, in one province or another, the highways are identical: a dike between two rice-fields, then a dusty road through open country, then, all of a sudden, offering defiance to the motor-car, a ferry, old and leaking, poled along by thin-armed Tongkingese. The rivers are so big and so shifting in their courses that they discourage bridge-building. According to season, the water rises, falls, vanishes, is back again. And some angry morning, it carries away dikes, roads, bridges, villages, the railway, everything in its path. Even the ferries, straining on their guide-ropes, end by snapping these and drift downstream, until eventually other ferrymen attach them to their ropes.

As soon as the flood subsides, water no longer

flows, but mud, reddish mud, which the Song Thai-binh, the Song King-mon, the Song Da-bach, the Red River, disgorge from their soft mouths into the Gulf of Tongking. Steamers going up the Cua-cam toward Haiphong scrape the mud-banks with their keels. Vainly a dredge passes up and down; the channel it digs simply fills in behind it. Nothing can stay this ooze that flows along and spreads out over everything. Even the sea has had to withdraw.

At first, it is merely a little thicker mud that collects all along the shore; next the crust hardens, and mangroves spring up as thick as evil weeds; then, little by little, the mud becomes soil. One fine day the peasants turn up and make little weirs and plant rushes to complete the warping. Twenty years later, their children have nothing to do but plow the furrows and transplant the green *ma*. In this way, paddy-field by paddy-field, the whole delta has been built up through the course of ages.

Hard work. Enervating climate. Sad horizon, dominated by the blue silhouette of three-peaked Ba-vi. The European is astonished that the Tongkingese prefers this depressing and unpleasant rice-land to the uncultivated uplands,

where development schemes vainly seek coolie-labor; but the Annamite is afraid of those accursed lands "that hasten life and daunt the stars." Up there, the water is bad, they say.

And the best reasons in the world do not convince them. It required years to persuade them to enter the factories of Nam-dinh and of Haiphong and to draw them to the mines and the plantations. It is hard to conceive the artifice required on the part of a contractor to sign up even a hundred coolies in this starving delta.

One morning on the road I overtook a column of these wretches—as pitiful as a file of emigrants or convicts—being led to the railway by a half-caste contractor. Nearly all of them carried bundles in their hands or strung on bamboo poles. Hearing our motor-horn, they scattered precipitately. The most frightened climbed the embankments; the rest, pulling off their Tongking hats and holding them to their bodies, nearly broke their backs bowing to us, or stupidly watched us pass in open-mouthed wonder, while bleating youngsters fled between their legs.

"How much per coolie does the slave-dealer get?" I asked the young Annamite who was escorting me.

"The amount paid per head varies from thirty to forty piasters. Expenses deducted, the contractor gets about ten."

"And the women? The children?"

"Only their expenses are paid. So the ration of rice is cut down as much as possible. That is necessary, isn't it, if something is to be made?" He watched me out of the corner of his eye. Was he naïve simply, or hard-hearted, or was he sweetly mocking me? One never knows with these courteous Orientals, who do not even betray anger.

Behind us, in the dust of the motor-car, the flock continued on its way. I estimated that there in the dust a thousand piasters trotted.

RIVER SCENE IN INDO-CHINA, WHICH HAS NOT YET BEEN INTRODUCED TO ALL MODERN CONVENIENCES

CHAPTER II

A DAY AT PHU-QUI

WELL, and the Mandarin Road?

What shall I say about it? I ceased to think of it, forgot it. It meant nothing more to me than a topographical expression, something banal, a black line drawn down the coast on the map of Indo-China. Colonial Road No. 1.

And then suddenly there came a morning in December, often a pleasant time of year in Annam, since then the heavy rains are over. I left Thanh-hoa early to go to Phu-qui, where a festival was in progress among the Muongs of the forest. An Annamite chauffeur was driving me. He was dressed in French style, of course, with a Norfolk jacket, a soft felt hat, and a shirt-collar turned wide at the throat, in the latest sea-shore mode. By way of making diversion he ran over dogs—those thin yellow dogs almost as common as children and pigs in the villages. And when he could find none of these, he grazed the fright-

ened *nhaques,* who saved themselves with grotesque leaps.

I spread the map out on my knees, since neither the chauffeur nor I knew the road, and checked off the villages, each of them preceded by a watch-tower ascended nightly by the village watchman. The gardens were no longer uniformly surrounded with prickly bamboos, as in Tongking, but made a display of cactus, aloes, and wild pineapples. Here and there were fields of mulberry-trees. In France, when passing through a wood, one speaks simply of trees without any effort to distinguish them or to name them. As soon as one finds one's self under alien skies, however, there comes a sudden desire to know all about everything—like the curiosity of a child forever tormenting others with questions. I accordingly amused myself by picking out *areca*-palms, with their long slender columns, banana-plants, with their great leaves, mangosteens, jackfruit-trees, with their huge fruit, here called monkey-bread.

We followed a river for some distance and crossed several canals. The road coquetted with the railway, which first drew near and then retreated. At one moment there were dunes on the left, hiding the sea; then a plain, with magnificent

blue-black buffaloes grazing. The sun, more blinding because of the vaporous atmosphere, compelled me to close my eyes, and I looked out through the screen of my lashes.

Something ahead on the road caught my attention, something like a group of men standing up. I thought I distinguished streamers. Was it a funeral? Leaning forward, I strained to see.

There at the edge of the road was a red altar with gold tracery, an ancestral altar, such as one finds everywhere in Annam, but not usually transported thus to the edge of a ditch. A whole village in ceremonial costume crowded about—black tunics, blue blouses, the umbrella-hats of the village worthies, soiled turbans of coolies. Already I could see them bending their bodies in profound reverence.

The car slowed down but showed no sign of actually stopping. Several men, waving small flags, detached themselves from the group and barred our way. The chauffeur came to a halt just in front of the shrine. Meanwhile I jumped up, like a trigger snapping, to gaze in astonishment.

The Mandarin Road! Here it was, this time; I had found it at last! Ancient Annam was before me, and I took in the strange sight with my

whole being, filling myself with it as with a deep breath.

An entire village had posted itself at this crossing before Yen-li to show me the road to Phu-qui. For hours these kindly folk had been waiting. And what a marvelous picture they made, against the background of the plain, with their parasols, their banners, the bearded ancients politely making bows, notables in black gowns, barefoot soldiers in red blouses, and all the flags of the temple and of the communal house, storied with strange characters and dragons. This strange assembly, stirring in the dust, welcomed my simple car like a royal palanquin.

A young scholar with black-rimmed glasses sputtered something in French at the door of the car, but I was not listening. I was unable to concentrate. My thoughts were everywhere at the same time. These strange parasols with the long handles, the red-lacquered shrine with its bronze incense-burners, the oiled hair of the men and their turbans of thick silk crape, the little ivory plaques that some of the old men had fastened to their black robes—all these trivial details held my eyes. On my right I saw the road to Phu-qui, decorated along the edge with high poles from which fluttered many-colored streamers. I found

myself in the midst of a festival, and I feasted my eyes. Suddenly I was seeing it alive, my Mandarin Road. It was no longer the commonplace highway unrolling beneath the tires of the dusty motor-car, like an interminable reel.

I still have only to look at my couch with its scarfs of brilliant colors, which, on that day, were offered me by the singing Muong women, whose arms were heavily weighted with bracelets, to see again the marvelous road and live once more that strange day at Phu-qui, the more beautiful among my memories because it was the first.

I have forgotten nothing, in spite of the months that have passed: the procession of twenty parasols that met me a hundred kilometers farther on, at the entrance to the village, the noisy gong-players who gave an impression of striking bells, the two lines of singers with high voices, the fire-crackers thrown in front of us by the hundreds, the *huyen* in a blue gown, escorted by the elders. And, especially, I remember an acrobatic drummer who gamboled beside an enormous tom-tom supported by two carriers, striking on it with hard blows and dancing all the while, blending thus in a wild harmony his agile steps and the boom of the buffalo-skin.

The whole procession escorted me, a clamorous,

motley throng. Presently we came to a river that swarmed with sampans flaunting gay banners, like so many birds spreading their wings. The ferry was covered with them. As I got in, I felt troubled by the ugliness of my costume. Close behind, the parasols jostled one another, forming a changeable canopy over our heads. In this fabulous equipage I suddenly remembered Gabriel de Lautrec, who once mysteriously nicknamed me Li-Loun-Peou, Elevated Mandarin of Six Parasols. His prediction—who would ever have believed it?—was now being realized. Was it not in honor of the strange coincidence that the boatmen of Song Gon set off squibs on their flag-bedecked barges?

While we ate lunch at the place provided for the delegation, an ape, frightened by the noise, tore about its cage and thrust long suppliant arms through the bamboo bars. In ordinary times, Phu-qui is merely a jungle post where two or three Frenchmen live as they can, getting the better of fever with quinine, but on this day everything was different. The inhabitants were out on holiday. The whole population of the village crowded to the door to see the white strangers eat, as we used to go to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, when

we were children, to see the Pahouins or the Kafirs in their huts.

The contrasts were picturesque and striking. Impeccable service, starched linen, silver, but, on the wall, the head of a gaur with enormous horns and the striped skin of a tiger killed last month just a few steps from this spot. The inspector of the native constabulary, who had got himself into a coat, talked to me of Paris. But his cadaverous yellow cheeks and feverish eyes did not escape me; only fifteen days ago fever very nearly took him off. And there, that crenelated building flying a flag, its bare walls pierced with loopholes? It is the little fort in which to take refuge, with sharp-shooters, in case of necessity. Every moment groups come up with presents: woven goods, baskets of oranges, embroideries offered by the women as they kneel. But it is time for coffee.

"Cognac or cherry brandy?"

And, immediately after, every one went off to the edge of the forest to get a drink from an earthen jar, each taking his turn at a hollow bamboo tube. Europeans seldom care for this rice-alcohol, which tastes like sharp beer, but for Annamites and Mois, Cambodians and Laotians, it is the festival beverage. The young dancers,

brought for our benefit on this occasion from distant villages, drank long drafts while the elders waited impatiently; then, refreshed, they once more took their places between the two rows of squatting comrades, who kept time clapping big bamboo sticks. As they danced, the upper part of the body held rigid, hands pressed down at their sides, they kept jumping over a stick, withdrawing one foot just at the instant when the bamboos, knocking together, were about to crush the ankle with a hard double blow. This is known among the Muongs as the Dance of the Bamboos.

The Muongs are a charming race, sister to the care-free Laotians. Like these, they will disappear at the time when the earth holds no more place for primitive folk. The forest shelters them; the forest nourishes them. They sing, they dance, they love, get intoxicated when they can, go in pilgrimage to ask the thunder-god at the temple of Doc-loi to protect them from sickness and from work. Who would not envy them?

But foreign concessions are multiplying in the upper Nghe-an. Little by little, the Muongs and the Thos, who grow rice on the wooded slopes, and the Mans, who live still higher up, are becoming "civilized." They must be taught wants, I have heard people say a hundred times.

GOSSIP BETWEEN VILLAGE WOMEN BELONGING TO THE ONCE POWERFUL CHAMS

You, lovely dancers with the embroidered jackets, you are to go to work on some cotton plantation, and you, agile drummer who gamboled along, showing me the road to Phu-qui, will perhaps pull a cart to pay for your *chum-chum* and your salt fish.

Formerly Doc-loi, on the Muong Mountain, was surrounded by huge trees, which an edict from the throne forbade any one to cut, and wild peacocks used to sweep their spotted trains before the temple. To-day the trees are laid low, the peacocks are gone. Soon the pilgrims will follow them, and, on the ancient soil of Annam, there will be one more of those deserted temples that tourists come to photograph without noticing that the gods have fled.

The Mandarin Road! I murmur the magic name, and I find myself once more standing at the door of Annam. With a few strides, I am transported to a height overlooking the dazzling bay of Vung-chua, fringed with foam and sown with little islets. It was here, in the hazard of victories, ebbing, flowing, that the fearsome bearded generals like those of the temples passed and repassed—Tongkingese invading Annam, the armies of Cochin-China marching up the delta, tattered troops of the Nguyens and Trinhs, of

Gia-long and of the Tay-sons, with their war-elephants and their litters hung with silk.

Mandarin Road! With eyes closed, I blot out the room, and the exquisite film of memory unwinds for me alone. Here are the jade rice-fields and the buffaloes driven by youngsters, stretched out on their backs; the tragic hills of Tam-diep, haunted by evil spirits; the blinding white marshes; the red roads underneath the palms; the noisy markets along the highway, displaying fruit, meat, vegetables, sweets, and so many flies on everything that one sometimes wonders if it is not insects that are for sale. And here is Kwang-tri with the little black bears that an affable resident is bringing up in his garden; Kwi-nhon, where I arrived one evening in time to see an illumination *à la chinoise,* with enormous, round, fish-glue lanterns; Vung-lam and its happy little dwellings under the tall cocoa-palms.

Again I find myself on the shore of the Song Da-rang, nearly two and a half miles across. Painfully the ferry makes its way to the other side, dragging its wooden stomach on the sand-banks, like a great seal. While my car is being brought over, I breakfast at the passenger shelter, while a small rice-eater, quite naked, is stationed

behind my little table to chase away the flies with a dilapidated feather brush.

Why does the memory retain insignificant images like these, when it forgets so many things one would wish to remember always? Has it secret caprices?

Here are two *becons* (small children) bursting into tears and running for all they are worth, in sheer terror, because one of the devils that we are has inadvertently given the impression that he is about to draw near. Next comes a blind beggar, leaning on a tall bamboo stick and led by a child. At the speed at which he runs after us he is certainly going to take a tumble. Next is a pretty and slight Annamite girl in an orange tunic, hiding herself shyly behind her parasol—it was on a Sunday that I caught sight of her, in a coast city of which I have forgotten the name. Then there was the magnificent day in which I climbed the Hill of Clouds. In one direction lay the Marble Mountains and the plains overhung with mist. North and south stretched the sea, marvelously blue, dotted with vaporous islands and tiny junks, thrown down in the distant bay of Tourane like crumbs for the sea-birds.

And Varella, wild Côte d'Azur, where the great

black rocks grow dizzy as they lean over to gaze at the little cascades of foam falling into the ravine. The lianas have tied their ropes to the twisted trunks of the trees. You climb and climb and then suddenly—emptiness and a winding descent. The frightened road clings to the wall of gray rock. It was here that I heard the stags calling one evening and the monkeys uttering little joyous cries.

The Mandarin Road? It has as many aspects as the journey has days. At one moment it is wide enough for an army, at another barely passable for a carrier. It digs its claws into the mountain, becomes mired in rice-fields, scales the hills, drops down and hides among thatched huts, then reappears a little farther on, putting on airs between two rows of *areca*-palms. It straightens out to pass through towns and closely inspects everything that amuses it—here a village of fisherfolk, there an ancient Cham tower, next some cotton plants, then some bamboos. And then unexpectedly it loses its footing and stops dead, in front of an old patched ferry-boat with waiting rowers.

I followed it all the way, to Nha-trang, where the railway comes to its aid, to Phan-rang, where nothing more is left of it but a grass-grown trail.

But never did I recapture the old Annamese road, the Mandarin Road, that showed itself to me for a single December morning when a whole village, in festival attire, waited for me beside its altar at the cross-roads of Yen-li.

CHAPTER III

HEROIC DAYS

"RECEPTIONS like that of Phu-qui? That was nothing, monsieur. They would have received you in the same way everywhere."

My host for the day—I used to arrive each evening at a new halting-place—shrugged his big shoulders. His wife, old like himself, nodded her head:

"Ah, monsieur, if you had only known Annam twenty years ago!"

These old colonials are so hospitable, so generous, that they are still regretting their inability to offer a passing Frenchman, by way of entertainment, all the vanished splendors of the Illustrious Kingdom of the South. Perhaps to make me envious, my hostess began one of her tales:

"I once secretly watched the Nam-giao procession when, for the last time, the Emperor Thanh-thai went to perform a sacrifice to the heavenly spirits."

"To the emperor of August Heaven Above," corrected her husband, with a slight nod.

"How splendid it all was! The emperor in his yellow robe, resting in his litter; an interminable procession of parasols, of banners, of mandarins with gold-embroidered robes and with great boots that prevented them from walking! Resting-places had been provided all along the route, and the honorable old men prostrated themselves with their foreheads in the dust. All that is past. You will go to Hué"—she pronounced it carefully Houé, in the proper manner—"to attend the Namgiao; believe me, you will not see much. The faith is gone, the customs are dying out."

"His Majesty now rides in a motor-car," murmured her husband in a tone of respectful reproach, a little as if he were guardian of rights.

"No, there is nothing picturesque any more," the lady finished.

"And I most certainly regret it on your account," concluded her husband.

How could I explain to them that I regretted it less than they? Contenting myself with a sigh that did not commit me, I began to contemplate the embroidered silk panels that decorated the drawing-room; a cock-fight to the right, peacocks and butterflies to the left, scenes that the crafts-

men of Bac-ninh have recopied without tiring from father to son, from master to pupil, ever since there have been Tongkingese to embroider and Frenchmen to buy.

I was spending that evening with old-fashioned colonials, of the vintage of those who came to Indo-China in the days when one died of fever and the piaster was worth fifty cents.

"I was as slender as a bamboo, monsieur, when I came out here," the husband repeated.

A glance at him was enough to give assurance that that was a good many years ago.

These people had known heroic days, not those of the conquest, be it understood, but the years that followed, the difficult period of isolation, of privations, of work without return, for which most of the witnesses repose in post cemeteries. Insurrections? The De-tham? Pirates? Not in the least. An abcess of the liver, cholera, fever. Those are the enemies that have killed more Frenchmen than the Black Banners. It required great men, with characters more strongly fortified than their bodies, to lead that kind of life. But in spite of everything, the survivors, looking back, refer to their happy years. They end by confusing, in like regret, their most devastating experience and their thirty lost years. Oh, the

THE KIND OF MOTOR ROAD THAT IS SUPERSEDING THE OLD MANDARIN ROAD IN THE MODERN FRENCH COLONY

wonderful life led then, all comrades eating at the same table, each one working as he liked, often without direction and always without credit, spending the whole of his pay, on some restless, homesick evening, in the café of the Wallachian woman or in the gambling-house of a Chinese, undertaking for no reason at all long journeys in a sampan or cockle-shell, talking familiarly with pirates who would finish, perhaps, as millionaires, and with no other meeting-place except the cafés of the Rue Paul-Bert and the Rue Catinat, where men gathered informally, bare feet thrust in heelless slippers and wearing coats with no shirts underneath.

"The whole street used to smell of absinthe, monsieur," recounted my host, warming to his theme. "And you stood up, you understand, you actually stood up to see a white woman pass. In the evening you played cards with a friend, and the next day you made yourself useful taking him to 'Bangkok.' A pernicious attack!" He was amused, naïvely boastful, that he himself had escaped this.

"Be sure you do not get fooled," he counseled me as I was leaving. " 'Bangkok' is the cemetery for Saigon, taking its name from the road that leads to it. Do not repeat the blunder of the

Parisian journalist who, hearing about the dead being buried at Bangkok, all the time, reported that Cochin-China sent its dead to be interred in Siam, in order not to alarm the population."

He laughed till he shook at the recollection. Everything seemed amusing in his memories: the typhoon that devastated Hanoi, the cholera epidemic, the bombs of the Rue Paul-Bert, the pirate raids, and the astonishing plot in which all the garrison of the citadel was to have been poisoned. From this the soldiers managed to escape, some with terrible dysentery, some with a bad attack of fever, so that very likely you might have seen a member of the Legion, dressed in his night-shirt and mounted on a bicycle, riding aimlessly about the town at top speed until dawn, his eyes fixed on his handle-bars and his forehead dripping sweat.

"No, you will never see that sort of thing again," my host sighed after each anecdote.

It is true. That Indo-China is no more. The land of adventure in which efficient though slightly cracked administrators lived like little kings, far out of reach of any control, inspiring respect in the people by sleight-of-hand tricks, surrounding themselves with native mates charmingly decked out, and dispensing justice in the shade of a shaddock-tree—this land exists no

longer except in the conventional imagination of the romantically minded. Roads, telegraph-lines, motor-cars, have upset all the old customs. The colony has undergone greater development in fifteen years than Europe in a century. No longer is Cochin-China an immense marsh; no longer, is Angkor inaccessible in the heart of its forests; Saigon is to-day the second port of France. When people describe the colonials as harebrained daredevils, stuffed with opium and quinine and dedicated to a mysterious and appalling existence, they are as far behind the times as if they describe the Paris boulevards overrun with dandies riding about in phaëtons, the mistresses of Gavarni's day, and the gay followers of Milford l'Arsouille.

From those heroic times, only a few half-legendary after-dinner stories have come down, still told to amuse new arrivals. Some of them, for example, that of the meteor—how many times did I hear it!—have become classics.

The hero, an old *légionnaire* and an incorrigible tippler whose adventurous life overflowed with experiences, was living at that time as a postal official in a village of the Haute Région. He remained for months at a time without seeing a single white person, scratched out of the world,

his only tie with civilization a slender telegraph-wire on which egrets perched. One needs to have paid a visit to some of those lost stations to understand the follies to which isolation can push a man. One lonesome day the exile was seized with an imperious, immediate need to see a white face, a man like himself, a Frenchman. He was sick of hearing nothing but the gibberish of the Annamites and Thais; he had seen enough of eating with chop-sticks, of the eternal prostrations; he could stand no more. He knew that a geological mission was at that time passing through Tong-king, and on the spur of the moment he sent the government general a long despatch, in which he told how a meteor, weighing several tons, had just fallen near his post, boring an enormous hole in the ground. He now felt certain of seeing somebody, and no doubt that night he went to sleep with a more contented mind. But by the next day he had had time to reflect. To upset the plans of these learned gentlemen of the mission was all very well, but unfortunately the blame would come home to him. There would be the devil to pay, all his hopes for advancement lost! At last, to straighten things out, he sent the governor another telegram: "Useless to send mission. Meteor has departed."

Gouvernement Général d'Indo-China

THE AGED KING SISOWATH OF CAMBODIA IN TRADITIONAL COSTUME

And there was that other who, to give himself the illusion of not being so solitary at his post, found a title for each of the animals that frequented his garden, from the mandarin-blackbird to the noisy bullfrog. At the hour for *apéritifs* he used to summon them gaily.

"Well, well, *M. le Procureur!* And you, captain, how are you? Hullo, here is our friend the customs inspector." He actually pushed his politeness so far as to get up out of his chair for the ladies.

Perhaps it was this same official whom his dumfounded charges one day saw launching his bathtub in the river and then climbing into it. Deliberately, in this small sheet-iron vessel, he abandoned his quarters without even asking where the current was going to take him. A good epilogue, one might say, for a colonial romance entitled "Bamboo Madness."

The old-timers of the colony have really lived that romance. They knew, for instance, the military doctor who in order to escape from the heat hit on the idea of giving his consultations at the bottom of a dry well, where he installed his office for the hot season. Leaning over the well-curb, a terrified Annamite would confide his ailment to the subterranean deities, and from the entrails of

the earth the muffled voice of the major would answer:

"You must be having a bad fever-attack; better take plenty of quinine."

They were all received at the Hanoi residence of that facetious administrator whose well trained boy welcomed you with the words:

"Come in. This is the house of the sage."

If the guest, a little surprised, stared at the singular, almond-eyed Scapin, the imperturbable Asiatic continued:

"My master, for a ridiculous pittance, assumes responsibility for the welfare of the Annamite people."

When the master, appearing on the scene, demanded, "Nam, what are your rights?" the boy would answer with a bow:

"I have the free disposal of my passive obedience."

Nor has any one forgotten that lively, capable resident who nevertheless was the despair of his chiefs, because of his utter indifference to everything. One day the governor himself, on a tour of inspection, spent the morning admonishing him:

"You need to keep an eye on yourself. We must make a good appearance before the people. Decorum is necessary."

To all of which the good-natured official listened without a word.

At luncheon—a big, official luncheon—the lecture was still going on. At the end of the repast, under some pretext or other, the resident excused himself from the table. A moment later, *linhs* in parade-dress entered the room, straps under the chin, followed by musicians, banner-bearers, all the mandarins, big and little, of the province, with their hands tucked inside the big sleeves of their ceremonial robes. Finally, at the tail-end of the procession, came the resident, naked as a new-born child, his beard spread out fanwise on his chest. Accompanied by a tom-tom, he kept shouting in time:

"Must have decorum. *Zim, boom, boom!* Must have decorum. *Zim, boom, boom!*"

Was he nominated for first-class rank after that? I doubt it.

And that epic adventurer—I might name him—who paid an official visit to some insubordinate village, took his glass eye out of its socket, placed it on the ancestral altar, and informed the frightened inhabitants that he was leaving it there to watch them.

Yarns, say the skeptics. Perhaps. The sun makes one inventive. Tongking is the country of

embroiderers. But, good or bad, irresponsible hotheads or not, those are the men who made Indo-China, and that is all that ought to count. Since their time, a younger lot has replaced the old order. Little by little, life has become normal, and there is no more place in the civil service for the meteor official or residents who go voyaging in bath-tubs.

Jean Ajalbert told me one day about a luncheon given by the Frenchmen of Asia in honor of Maurice Long, then governor-general of Indo-China. All the visiting writers who had assembled began to amuse themselves by recalling tales passed down in the gossip of the Far East for the past quarter of a century. Only the governor had nothing to say. Some one remarked his silence. Did not he too have an anecdote to tell?

"No," the governor confessed. "The Indo-China you are talking about I never knew. It no longer exists."

In this he was right. The old, mysterious, blood-soaked Annam of Jules Boissière and Albert de Pouvourville is quite dead. The heroic, fantastic colony of which Pierre Mille made himself the laughing historian is now grown wise. It has already passed into legend, with the great shadows of Francis Garnier, Henri Rivière,

Balny d'Avricourt. The traveler who leaves home with the secret hope of forgetting our civilization in an Orient all embroidered with dragons will risk disillusionment before returning. Hurry, you last travelers. But a few vestiges remain of the Old Annam of the conquest; soon there will be nothing left.

When I saw old King Sisowath, in a black derby hat ornamented with a superb aigret, climbing painfully into his red and yellow limousine at Pnom-penh, I understood that all was over. Tomorrow the priest will have his fountain-pen, and the mandarin will be riding a bicycle.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN EXOTICISM: FROM PALANQUIN TO MOTOR-CAR

THERE are certain old people who can never speak without sighing: "In my time—"

What about their time? Was life sweeter then, men better, the world more beautiful? No. Simply they were younger and looked at life with fresh eyes that saw its marvels. Let us do likewise. Of what use is it to weep at having arrived too late in a world grown old and weary? Let us rejoice, rather, at being of our own time in a new world. Old Asia, of the legend, is dead: a pity! Let us admire it, then, as it is to-day.

You go up to the door of China by railway. The sons of mandarins, instead of crowding the assembly of scholars, study for their degrees at the law-school. Motor-boats cut through the Canal of the Bamboos. Not again will the wonderful white horse, Bach-ma, trace new cities in the plain by geomancy; an urban architect has taken his place. But is this so surprising, after all, when you remember that they are now dancing the fox-trot at

Seville, that the Grand Canal smells of gasolene, and that the negroes of Dakar buy themselves coats on credit?

For myself, I take what comes gladly enough. I shall not see, I know, the Ten Thousand Mandarins of Annam prostrating themselves in the great court of the Palace at Hué on the occasion of the *Têt,* the Annamese New Year's day, striking their foreheads three times on the flagstones. I shall not see his Majesty Khai-dinh being carried through his capital in state at the time of the Spring Festival, nor the royal elephants fighting in the ancient arenas, before the court. Nowadays his Majesty dispenses his benedictions from an auto, and I have encountered the sacred elephants on more than one morning at the Pool of the Golden Waters, carrying fodder and carting wood. I am quite sure nevertheless that this marvelous country holds other joys for me.

"You come too late," colonials who knew the Eminent South in its dying splendor have remarked a hundred times.

I refuse to accept that point of view. The old Dai-nam existed, but no regrets of mine can bring it to life, and whatever anachronistic fêtes and degenerate ceremonies still survive do not even attract me.

What is dead is dead. I shall not attend, at Nam-dinh, the convention of the literati. I shall not see his Majesty plow the sacred reserved fields with great ceremony under the venerable banians of the temple of Kiep-bac, where I once meditated in solitude. I shall not encounter the procession of sterile women who are being exorcised, writhing in front of the altar amid the clash of gongs and the pilgrim crowds, in order to vomit the devil within. So much the worse!

In the western plantations, I saw, instead of the elephants I expected, steam stump-pullers clearing acres of brush. I was present at Ban Methuot, in the heart of the Moi country, at the first motion-picture performance given these naked wild folk, with skin the color of leather, who were jammed in front of the screen. I saw a crowd of ragged Tongkingese getting off a trolley-car just a short distance from the Sontay Road, where the Black Banners, only forty years ago, massacred Henri Rivière and his soldiers. I saw Annamites knee-high to a grasshopper contesting for prizes at the hippodrome of Hanoi, while natives in coats, field-glasses at their sides, discussed and made calculations on the winning chances of the various horses. I saw the Chinese of Cholon dressed in their best, on the day of Great Purity, descend

ANNAMITE OFFICIALS KNEELING IN NINE RANKS IN THE COURT IN FRONT OF THE THRONE ROOM AT HUÉ

from their little cycle-cars to weed the tombs of their ancestors and to make offering to the ancestral spirits of choice fruits and lacquered pigs. I saw *nhaques* at Saigon taking courses in mechanics. In Cochin-China I umpired a football game between barefoot Annamites. When all is said and done, these things are as curious as the ancient ways.

"Nothing picturesque left," people insist.

That is nonsense. Our Occidental customs introduced into Indo-China have not destroyed the picturesque; they have merely transformed it.

Why should one regret the old-time palanquins when at any moment one can see passing along the dusty roads those unbelievable colonial autobuses, loaded with natives whose bare feet stick out at every angle, *congaies* with white handkerchiefs, old Annamites with parasols, boys with gold-filled teeth, interpreters with glasses, wonder-struck peasants, all piled one on top of another and with their baskets and bicycles tied at the back or fastened to the running-board, so that the van itself ends by disappearing under this anomalous load, and it seems to be the travelers who are carrying the auto, like ants dragging a fly?

This Indo-China, transfigured by half a century of occupation and turned topsyturvy by our in-

ventions, offers as much that is unexpected as the mummified Far East which has slept for centuries in its yellow silk robe. Why wish to love only what others have loved before us, honor only the beauty that time has consecrated, accept as genuine only what has become trite? The unexpected is what really astonishes. I am not in the least surprised at these tropical landscapes, these marvelous ruins: I knew I should find them. I am not astonished at these Asiatic customs: this is Asia. What confounds me is the continual contrast between the archaic and the modern, the unprecedented meeting of these two civilizations, separated by thousands of years.

To open a dam in Bourgogne is an ordinary affair. To witness a ritualistic ceremony in Annam has nothing of the unexpected about it. The inauguration of the dam at Lien-son last year, with the excited engineers working the siphons and the sluice-gates while the mandarins, all facing the river, at a given signal from the drums simultaneously prostrated themselves in worship of the Spirit of the Waters—there you have the unexpected paradox. There is your modern colony.

What difference if we do not find what those admired who came before, if there are other

things at which to marvel? Everything is interesting to him who knows how to see. I did not cross the water to count the gilded Buddhas and the four-armed Vishnus crowded in temples and museums, in private collections and in curio-shops. I cried halt at the twentieth pagoda I was led to. I had had enough of generals grimacing in the shadows of sanctuaries, of lacquer, of pillars ornamented with edifying sentiments, of incense-burners bristling with chimeras, of bronze gongs hanging in frames in black wood.

A new kind of exoticism has come into existence, and it is time to say good-by to the Far East of the old travel-books. The monstrous machine now rolling over the world, making all five continents alike, has passed this way; there is no use disguising the fact any longer.

I remember on the day of my arrival at Mytho, in Cochin-China, suddenly catching sight of a broad expanse of water through the trees.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh, that is our tennis-court!" answered a young Frenchwoman of the post, with a touch of pride, thinking that I was referring to the court near the promenade on the waterfront.

I did not laugh nor did I undeceive her. As a matter of fact, she was right; I should not have

been astonished at finding the Mekong quietly flowing there in its proper channel, but, on the bank of the Father of Rivers, a cement tennis-court!

Up to this time our civilization, in imposing itself on the Old World, has brought it more ugliness than beauty. The horrible iron bridge across the River of Perfumes at Hué makes the little Japanese bridge of Faifo seem even more charming; the various capitals are disgraced by the official buildings, large hotels, and villas; the animated canals of Cholon, crowded with junks, will be greatly missed when they are replaced with the broad avenues now planned; in the silent court of the Great Buddha at Hanoi, I cursed the factory chimney dominating the somber canopy of the mango-trees. (All writers, incidentally, describe the trees; not one has chosen to mention the chimney!)

But how many are the surprises in the midst of these disappointments! I see myself once more, for instance, in this temple of Chan-vu, nowadays called only by the name of the Great Buddha, though the Buddha has nothing whatever to do with its Chinese deities. In a dark chamber at the back of the sanctuary I was trying hard to make out something of Chan-vu, the Dark War-

rior, from whom an officiating priest for a consideration of twenty cents had obligingly withdrawn the covering. I could see nothing but the gleaming surface of the bronze giant. Always amiable, the venerable guide pressed a button: there over the altar, for the benefit of pious Annamites and generous tourists, was a hundred-candle-power electric light.

At Pnom-penh, also, the mere sight of a yellow-robed priest with shaven head, choosing bulbs from a packing-box, made me smile. Just the same, if Europe has any reason to be proud, it is for the revelation it has made to the Old World of this new beauty, light. Thanks to it, Cholon seems to be holding an eternal festival; the gloomiest temples give up their treasures; and some night suddenly we shall see all the fish-glue lanterns with their bizarre characters down the length of the main street that traverses Kwi-nhon light up at a single instant, like so many fallen moons; by search-light we shall see illuminated the marvelous five towers of Angkor, imprisoned in night.

The Far East can afford to display as much light as our big boulevards; the picturesque quality will not suffer. Electricity simply becomes primitive when it lights up little shops in which

the coolies squat in rows on benches, eating fish garnished with herbs and rice-balls.

If you transplant French vegetables into Indo-China, at the second crop they will have turned into a product of the country. A potato becomes an insipid yam; the tomato, swollen with water, is flavorless; spinach sprouts into gigantic leaves. In the same way our customs, our creations, even our utensils, become Annamese through the process of transplanting. Nothing resists this slow absorption, not even the railway. At the station, look at the jam of ragged peasants, of women in black gowns, half-dressed Chinese, bearded elders, children with shaven pates. This railway also has something exotic about it; it is as appropriate to the landscape as the buffalo-carts.

A Chinese can make himself as ridiculous as he pleases by putting on a coat in which he is lost and covering his microscopic head with a derby that is much too big for him; he remains Chinese just the same, uniquely, superbly Chinese. Anybody might have thought that photography would have destroyed the charm that existed in the old prints, but look at the crudely colored enlargements of little Annamite ladies in tightly wound turbans, smilingly posed in front of a pagoda, reproduced on screens. Is not this sort of thing

worth just as much as prints, made by the thousand for the local trade or for export?

And this bicycle, ridden by a barefoot orderly. And this disreputable car, fit for the scrap-heap, carrying a Moi dressed in a striped loin-cloth up a goat-trail. And these motion-picture theaters, in which the natives applaud the acrobatics of Douglas. Do these things bear the taint of the West? Not in the least.

Every January the Chettis of Saigon, the Hindu money-lenders, swathed in curtain muslin and with a bath-towel round the neck—for such is their costume—give a great festival in honor of their protectress, the goddess Souppramanya. In the evening a procession forms in front of the pagoda in Ohier Street, that wealthy pagoda which continually surprises me by the contrast between its ornamental tower and the "post no bills" sign plastered all over its pink walls. Between two long rows of torches, and preceded by banners, parasols, and musicians, the silver chariot of the goddess moves forward, drawn by two great white oxen. Somewhere in the crush of the shouting people behind is the victim.

He has been praying and fasting for eight days for strength to endure. With knives stuck in his feet and an enormous pin transfixing his tongue,

he pulls a small cart, and the traces of it are fastened into his flesh with long silver hooks. Eyes rolled upward, and frothing at the mouth in a horrible way, he leads the crowd, while the fanatical money-lenders urge him on with their clamor and mercilessly jostle a second more modest martyr, who has merely transformed himself into a human pin-cushion. It is an astonishing spectacle, this vision of fanatical India. It makes you gasp.

Suddenly I am aware of a monotonous *tac-tac-tac* that I seem to recognize. As I thought, it is the sound of a motor! The silver chariot of the goddess—O progress—is electric-lighted; a two-cylinder engine is installed behind the ambulatory altar. The mechanic shouts with the others, half mad with transportation, as if he were on his way to the Ganges with living sacrifices, but all the same he has some extra spark-plugs in his pocket.

Some people believe that European inventions are going to produce a revolution in the Old World. This is a great mistake. The Old World adopts, but it is not astonished. Give the yellow race the telegraph, and they send telegrams; the phonograph, and they listen to songs; the railway, and they buy tickets. But they do not change fundamentally for these trifles. As a

French High Commission

TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRIDGE ACROSS THE "RIVER OF PERFUMES" AT HUÉ, ANCIENT CAPITAL OF ANNAM

matter of fact, it is the machine that is metamorphosed.

It is with the same engine and the same baskets as M. Deibler that M. de Saigon, executioner of Cochin-China, has already chopped off more than three hundred heads; yet in his hands the guillotine has become an instrument of torture as archaic as the knife and block of former times. The engine is made ready; and the hangman, at whom the crowds of gaping simpletons stare fearsomely, bows to it: a ritualistic *lay,* a consecrated *lay,* palms flat and forehead in the dust. Then rising and at the same time continuing to bow, he scatters a pinch of rice, places a little ball of *chum-chum* on the lever, lights an incense-stick in the lunette. The slant-eyed Deibler pays his devotions to the Spirit of the Guillotine! He alone is acquainted with this devil, who lurks in the wind on days of storm and seizes you by the neck; he alone dreads it. To appease it, so that it will graciously accept the criminal about to suffer punishment, he prays in a chanting voice and makes offerings respectfully.

The remarkably intelligent Annamite people, who reverence wisdom above all else, have bent themselves to Occidental civilization with the same ease as the Japanese. They have not even

registered surprise; they have fallen in behind. This is their great power. They do not resist; they adapt themselves. Gifted with an exceptional faculty of assimilation, they instantly accept the practices of the conqueror. Strange mimicry, when the plant takes on the coloring of the chameleon! For centuries China held Annam in vassalage. It became Chinese, adopted Chinese writing, morality, art, customs, gods. So Chinese, in fact, that in the pagodas of Annam festivals long since forgotten in the Celestial Empire are still faithfully celebrated. Nowadays it is France who reigns, and the people are fast becoming French. So French that in the mixed schools young Annamites do better than the white students in examinations; so French that they very soon excel us in the crafts and in the games which we ourselves have taught them and which have supplanted theirs; so French that they know our history better than their own, speak of Joan of Arc but no longer remember Le Van Duyet; so French actually that some of them, who dress like Parisians and send their sons to study abroad, affect no longer to understand a compatriot who speaks their own tongue and express themselves in it with difficulty, searching for words as if they were making a mental translation.

If some day the Russians cross China and invade our Far East, the Annamites, two years later, will have icons and go to sleep on the stove, provided they do not have to light it.

This explains why Annam, this ancient Annam stranger to none of the most precious fantasies of the spirit, nevertheless has failed to produce a single great personal work, has given birth to neither a great poet nor a great ethical teacher, to not one architect, painter, or sculptor of genius. Everything to be admired, between the Red River and the Mekong, transparently reflects the foreign model. Upon this the Annamite has worked with infinite taste, but the spark of creative genius has not flared up in him.

Will these people some day discover the force to weld themselves into a nation? Molded by us, what will they turn into? What new generation will be born of this curious marriage of two civilizations? As yet no one can foresee.

The Annamite—I refer to the city-bred fellow who attends our schools and lives in contact with the French—is now really without any equilibrium. He has escaped from his ancestral doctrines but has not yet become adjusted to ours. Guided above all by an immeasurable pride, he sets out to imitate us. Not that he admires us;

he merely wants to prove that he is as good as we are. No longer obedient to the ancestral code, in which the best elements of Confucianism are gathered together, no longer believing in the gods, freed of every spiritual exaction, he cares for nothing but enjoyment.

But is not enjoyment the sole object of existence among civilized peoples, somebody will ask. Quite so. But the European, even without religious faith, carries within himself the essential principles of a code which incidentally the police and judges see that he carries out. The Asiatic, on the other hand, deprived of his hereditary standards and ignorant of our laws, no longer has anything to serve him as guide. Moral instability is spreading even among the humble folk. *Nhaques* and coolies, denied the teaching of their old masters of the native schools—the *tong-su* who taught them the ancient morality before arithmetic, and who wanted to nourish the soul equally with the mind—removed from the fear of harsh mandarin justice, more and more are left to their own instincts. All informed colonials, the old officials and the missionaries, agree that the general standard is lower.

In former times, with the organization of the Annamite commune, there were no poor; to-day

the cities overflow with them. The leaders, white or yellow, were looked up to; they are barely respected now. Between the older and younger generations a chasm is being opened. Different customs, different manners. And when the ancestral altar is replaced with a buffet of pine-wood, it is not merely a question of furniture that is uppermost.

The fathers are still Old Annam; the sons want to be "just the same as French." Watching them, one gets the impression of two separate classes, two entirely different races, even. This unlikeness appears in the most trivial details of every-day life. I have only to evoke the memory of meager dinners I had to eat now and again, in casual hotels at chance stopping-places. Here I often found families seated at a French meal. The situation was ridiculous and moving at the same time. The young fellows, dressed like me, hair glistening with brilliantine, nonchalantly ate roast chicken and veal *à la jardinière,* talked in loud voices and laughed noisily. The old parents, in their long robes, were exceedingly dignified but fearfully embarrassed. Holding knife and fork in the same hand, like chop-sticks, they fished in the sauce for their little peas, one by one, as if they were spearing them with a trident, and

scarcely achieved a single mouthful. After dinner, the conflict continued. The father went to pay his respects to the tutelary deities; the son lost himself in the "Voix Annamite." The father is afraid of the dragon; the son, of the policeman. The father reads Chinese characters, which he himself writes with a brush; the son makes a boast of the fact that he scarcely knows the *quoc-ngu,* the romanized Annamese in general use, and types his letters.

As sons come to look upon their fathers as inferior, do they yield them the consideration that children owe their elders? They continue to love them, but they venerate them less. Certainly we are far removed from the wisdom of the ancients: "No matter what age he may be, a son never sits down in the presence of his parents. When his father calls, he does not merely reply; he runs to him, he flies. If he holds some object in his hand, he throws it down. If he is chewing a morsel of something, he discards it."

But it is unfair to conclude that there is no longer any genuine affection in these disorganized families. The modern offspring surrounds his old father with the same flattering attentions, but as a kind of indulgence, of condescension.

I never felt this quite so clearly as one fine Jan-

uary day when I happened to be the guest of a rich Annamite who had set up a copra factory in the midst of palm-groves on an island in the Mekong.

An almost unbelievably charming country. I have seen nothing so purely exotic even at Penang, the laughing little island off the Malay coast, even at Ceylon. In the middle of the immense river, which can turn as rough as the sea, lies a green island, crossed by two beautiful roads of red earth trampled by bare feet. Canals form tunnels through the drooping palms, and in their shade sleep enormous junks and sampans, waiting to be loaded. Everywhere else one suffocates, but here a gentle breeze is wafted along the streams and lurks under the great mango-trees. There is only just sufficient sun to enliven the orange of a scarf, the green of a *nipa*-palm. Naked children beat a hasty retreat to their huts or hide themselves behind the banana-plants as I come along. Just a year ago, before a regular ferry was established between the shore and the island, no white person had ever set foot on it. The whole island—trees, animals, people, junks with painted eyes, *cainhas* thatched with dried leaves—belongs to my young Annamite friend.

At the crushing-shed, I am greeted by an odor

as of warm bread. The copra-oil is running off into trenches that are tended by a coolie whose polished skin looks as if it had been anointed. We pay a visit to the commissary shed. There on the hard-beaten ground, half unpacked, lie scattered a heterogeneous assortment of objects, absurd enough in proximity: Chinese blue bowls and old-fashioned oil-lamps, lacquered panels incrusted with mother-of-pearl and alarm-clocks, wooden shoes and cloth caps, Tongkingese palm-leaf hats and indelible pencils, tin anklets and pocketbooks. Suspended from the timbers of the ceiling is a huge wooden cask, painted red, which catches the eyes of astonished children; with the aid of two great pieces of buffalo-hide, it has been turned into a magnificent tom-tom. Everything is for sale here—silk turbans, umbrellas, little porcelain spoons, Chinese almanacs, knives with thirty-two blades—everything, even the drum. And one pays on a weekly instalment plan, as you do at Dufayel's.

Finally we reach the house, my host's ancestral residence. A large sun-porch with lacquered pillars opens on the garden. In spite of myself, though without irony, I smile. The place has an air of both a pagoda and a dentist's office.

The red and gold ancestral altar has been put

THE PALACE AT SAIGON CONSTRUCTED FOR THE GOVERNOR GENERAL AT A COST OF A MILLION DOLLARS

out of the way somewhere and has been replaced, in an effort to bring things up to date, with a dining-room table with turned feet, Henry II style. On top of it everything essential to ceremony has been arranged: bronze incense-burner, miniature cups in which to serve tea, incense-sticks, the betel service with its little jar of lime —and a photograph of the mother, done on porcelain, in a frame of *art nouveau.*

In the drawing-room hang sumptuous Chinese embroideries and panels of lacquer ornamented with moral precepts, but Occidental art is likewise represented. Here, for instance, is the Source, with a nymph quenching her thirst at an electric-light bulb, and all the way down the wall are enlargements that must have cost a pretty penny at the photographer's shop in Saigon. We are invited to sit down in gilded Louis XV arm-chairs.

Why has some one left this bulging lantern, ornamented with grotesqueries, dangling above the doorway? It must have been forgotten.

The son refers to his dead mother reverently but with a smile, because out here death does not wear the same frightening look that we attribute to it. Her tomb is just behind the house in the garden; from the little kiosk where one may go

to take the air, she herself no doubt watched it being built. The monument was certainly ordered from a marble-cutter of Père-Lachaise or the Avenue du Maine, and mechanically one reads the commonplace epitaph on the stone: "Here lies . . . deceased in her sixty-eighth year . . . Pray for her. . . ." Pray to what God? Wreaths hang here; and little lizards, not in the least frightened, chase mosquitos.

Like dwelling-place, like master. Everything is incongruous, nothing fits. The father, an old gentleman with finely drawn features, skin the color of amber and a beard of three hairs on his pointed chin, is an utter stranger to the affairs of his son and leads a retired existence on his island. He does not know one word of French and listens to the conversation with an impassive face. If he happens to forget to shake hands, he gives a salutation in the old manner, shaking his own clasped hands slightly and bowing. At table—where tireless boys fan us to keep off the mosquitos during a delicious repast in the French style—he eats like us, holding his knife in his finger-tips, and he does not resent the champagne. But our talk on education, rubber, the monopoly of the port of Cholon, the colonial elections, does not interest him in the least, even when a guest

carefully translates everything to him. He is of another time, another world.

The son has lived in Paris. He has two motor-cars, wins motor-boat races, and plays tennis. Since he was twelve years old, he has not worn Annamese dress, and he speaks French almost without an accent. His father's eyes, filled with admiration, never leave his face. It is his child who has made a rich plantation out of a virtually unproductive island; it is he who has erected this factory, installed this machinery, acquired these junks; he it is who has made all these thousands of piasters flow like water, produced all this troublesome luxury of which nevertheless one is so proud. On occasions the son, breaking off his talk, turns to the old Annamite and asks him how he is getting along or if he wants anything. With what childlike affection the old man replies! Of the two, he is the child.

"As long as the parents live, the son possesses nothing," says the ancestral precept.

How old and out of date those precepts are! Will the father telephone the orders, cable the instructions, sign the checks? Laotze did not foresee bank-accounts and profits on stock.

That night, as I set out on my way again, the trees were covered with fireflies. They flashed a

thousand gold darts in the darkness; the palms were starred with them like a Christmas tree. All along the Mekong was a fairy illumination, a glitter of sparks.

With the crude occidentalized version of life I had just been seeing and these electrified palm-trees, I asked myself if I might not expect to hear the crackling of a Rühmkorff coil.

CHAPTER V

PIERRE LOTI AND THE BAY OF ALONG

NIGHT came, mysterious and gentle. Leaving the boy setting the table in the microscopic dining-saloon, I went out on deck. Alone between the sky and the water, I was thinking: Is it goose or swan? I was uncertain. Elbows on the rail, eyes fixed on the distance, I saw the islands and the sea less clearly than the wavering curve of my own thoughts.

Fable or truth?

A writer has the singular ability to create reality out of idle stories, to make blue seem red, to turn chalk into cheese, as the saying is. If he is really gifted, the lies he launches in the universe become truer than fact. "A book without lies would be very strange," Napoleon once remarked. Napoleon obviously was not a writer.

Is the narrator permitted to alter, disguise, change the nature of what he has seen and undertaken to recount? When a poet meets a goose, he says, "It is a swan." So far as the poet is con-

cerned, I expect only beautiful dreams from him, and I am grateful to him for taking me away from reality. But should the ordinary writer follow him? I do not think so. The author who paints imaginary beings in a land of fantasy has every license, but he who tells me of happenings with which I am familiar, describes beings like myself, places where I have lived, has no right to cheat me. Art sometimes demands transfiguration; it does not admit of lying. Good faith, O Montaigne! *"Si c'eust esté pour rechercher la faveur du monde, ie me feusse paré de beautez empruntées* . . . If I had wished to capture the favor of the world, I should have decked myself in borrowed beauties . . ." It is no more my object than Montaigne's. I purpose quite simply to tell the truth. If it is a swan, I shall say, "It is a swan"; and if it is a goose . . .

I have no doubt that Indo-China of fifty years ago would have lent itself to more highly keyed pictures, more romantic descriptions, than to-day. But is it not just as enthralling to see the convulsion of customs that is taking place, the startling evolution that is transforming the life of the people?

"Progress," some say.

"Decadence," others maintain.

When the emperor of Annam went to Saigon not long ago before departing for France, a reception was given by the governor in order that the élite of Cochin-China might have the honor of being presented to the sovereign. The emperor does not scorn our civilization—far from it. He goes out only in a motor-car, has had his palace apartments done over in European fashion, draws and sculptures, not in traditional style, but after the manner of a student at the Beaux-Arts. Nevertheless, when he saw all those sham Annamites in coats and white cravats, a shiver passed over him, which everybody noticed, and he measured them with such a frozen expression and so haughty a bearing that all the participants felt embarrassed and the presentations were cut short. A recluse in his palace at Hué, ignorant of many things, his Majesty had just discovered the abyss already separating his throne from these progressive Annamites. For him, it is decadence that has set in.

What would the emperor have said if, from a shaky box in the native theater of Phan-rang, he had watched the absurd performance I saw? Between two acts of an interminable drama filled with luridly painted generals and squeaky princesses, an Annamite dancer, dressed in opera tin-

sel from a bankrupt stock-company, made an attempt to pirouette to the "Madelon," played by ragged musicians on a bamboo viol!

Or if he had condescended to visit the charming *doc-phu* of Mytho Province, who has retained nothing of Annam except the black gown, and who receives you, not in the room ornamented with lacquer, but in a French salon with plaster columns and mahogany furniture, where you may admire between two vases from Hué a Nénette doll with frowsy hair, like the ones at the dressmaking and hair-dressing establishments of Montmartre. No tea in the afternoon: champagne. And the youngest daughter sat down at the piano and played the "Pélican" for us.

Progress or decadence?

You can scour all Indo-China, from Lao-kai to Bac-lieu, and not encounter on the highroad a single sedan-chair or a palanquin; nothing but a string of autobuses, of small cars climbing the hills on third, of limousines with elaborate furnishings. Before 1914, in all Indo-China there were only 389 motor-vehicles in operation; to-day there are very nearly four thousand. For an Annamite to be a chauffeur means much more than an employment; it is the equivalent of a title. The first chauffeur of the Résidence Supérieure

at Hué is decorated with the Dragon of Annam. When other chauffeurs come to the capital, they betake themselves with all speed to his garage to render homage.

Despite all this, the distiller of romance will more willingly offer you a chair-bearer or a *coolie-xe,* a rickshaw-coolie, than a speedy chauffeur: the former appears more exotic. Forever driven by this odious anxiety to make things appear picturesque, the writer prefers to drag in archaic *nhaques* going to market with strings of sapeks over their shoulders than to introduce readers to the busy Annamites certifying checks and counting paper piasters behind the windows of the Bank of Indo-China or of the Banking Corporation. Old Annam no longer has any place in the transformed colony of to-day. The old customs are vanishing.

Until recently, the Annamite who went on a long journey painted yellow lines all over his face to fool the evil spirits. Noting his pestilential appearance, the spirit would think the traveler sick and let him pass without throwing himself on him, and so the good man could travel in peace. But try presenting yourself, daubed like this, at the station-window to buy a ticket from Vinh to Nha-trang. No Annamite would dare do it; he

would be too much afraid that the employee would laugh in his face. Moreover the old beliefs are dying out. Everything is changing, changing.

But the watchman who climbs the lookout tower at night to frighten away the tigers, surely he is immune from this modern contagion? Not so. When he grows aware of *ong cop* prowling about and, up there in his shelter, wishes to frighten him off, he pulls the string, as it has always been pulled, but nowadays, in place of gongs, it has hanging from it empty gasolene-tins that knock together and make a terrible clatter. Yes, everything has changed—the spirit, like outward appearances. These days, when Indo-China grows excited, it is not as formerly about a message from Ham-nghi or the portents the scholars have received from the Dragon. It is because the market-price of paddy has dropped, or as a protest against the scandalous monopoly of the port of Cholon.

Only to the French of Paris has the colony remained the same: an immense marsh, colonials with fever-brilliant eyes, chickens at six cents apiece, opium, the official tour of inspection, pirates, gambling. The sins of the writers!

Recently I came across a novel in which an author, not knowing what other irreparable foolish-

ness to have his hero embark upon, sent him to Tongking. He wrote as if he were saying that his character had entered a monastery or retired to live among the Papous—a stupid blunder. Another has borders of hibiscus along the Rue Paul-Bert; one might as well plant elms on the Rue de la Paix! And of course no one ever forgets the *congaie,* the inevitable *congaie,* graceful as a bird, with perfumed hair, cooing love in the arms of a French savage.

May one be permitted to say that to-day the *congaie* hires herself out by the week, like a maid of all work; to add that, with the frightful custom of lacquering the teeth, the prettiest offer you, with their smiles, two rows of black stumps?

To reflections of this sort I gave myself on an all-day excursion through the bay of Along. At the end, the little steamer dropped anchor near one of the smallest islands, the one called, oddly enough, Grotte de la Congaie.

At first sight, the profusion of little carved islands, in which the rock seems to retain in its folds the restless movement of waves, simply makes you marvel. Then little by little the heart begins to contract. The sun is unsuccessful in gilding these sad gray peaks. Here is a vast romantic setting for terrifying tales. As the first

astonishment passes, a curious oppression takes its place in the middle of narrow passes, at the foot of abrupt cliffs, among mountainous islands so deceptively alike, sending back and forth in a somber echo the calls of the fishermen. You might think that an angry sea had swallowed the mountains. Only crests emerge, some blank as walls, others sculptured like Gothic portals. And at the far end of dark caverns, a shining eye, a hole of light. Common trees cannot attach themselves to these gigantic needles—only a few tortured cypresses and tangled lianas and wild pine-apples, humping evil backs like green hedgehogs. There is no sound except of waves striking the rock, the cry of a sea-bird.

Already I had visited the various curiosities of the bay—the Grotte de la Surprise, for instance, which is reached by a high stairway of heaped-up stones. An outer chamber opens into a narrow and tortuous passageway, in which the walls ooze moisture. The smoke from the bamboo torches makes your eyes smart and half suffocates you. You go forward gropingly, elbows at sides; then suddenly at a turn comes the surprise: a vast amphitheater of fallen rocks, into which the light drops perpendicularly, as at the bottom of a crater. Stalactites depend like stone waterfalls.

THE PICTURESQUE ISLAND-STUDDED BAY OF ALONG IN TONGKING, FORMERLY A FAVORITE HAUNT OF PIRATES

They cling against the gray wall like magnificent organs. In the center, more striking in its loneliness, rises a tall, slender monolith. It is the phantom king of this marine palace. Beyond is still another grotto, in which the floor is strewn with rocks resembling animals; an enormous tortoise, I remember especially, with a well delineated head. At night, I wonder, do they become animated at the command of the stone phantom?

What frightful sacrifices, what fearful rites, could be celebrated in this place! Never did I feel so alone, so foolishly small, as in this fantastic grotto. With my hands I clung to the damp rock, and I kept my eyes fixed on my Annamite rowers, waving their brands and exchanging calls that I did not understand.

Very quickly I scrambled up the passageway again. From the height of the cavern, I smiled at the steamer waiting below, and at the handkerchief some one was waving at me.

Taking advantage of the low tide, I proceeded to slip into the little tunnel leading to the Cirque. The rocky ceiling opens almost on a level with the water and is so low that you scarcely dare lift your head. All along the wall are the ratan rings to which the fishermen fasten their sampans when they come here for shelter on stormy nights. At

its end the passage shows a faint light, the opening grows larger, you shoot out into a circular lake of transparent emerald color, surrounded by inaccessible cliffs where monkeys disport themselves.

I also visited the Grotte des Merveilles, biggest of all, the huge nave of a cathedral, adorned from base to vault with enormous red and black inscriptions—names of vessels, dates, flags, Chinese characters, slang phrases—so that the rock itself can no longer be discerned under the bewildering sculptured advertisements, marking the passage of all the navies of the world. Some columns seem to be formed of millions of shells piled on top of one another; others are like massive tree-trunks, with stone roots twisting over the hard floor. The light plays capriciously on the rocks, streaked with green. The piercing cries of birds are audible; shadows of wings pass by.

And I saw too the Marionettes, the Fou, the Cimetière, and finally the Congaie. This last is not much: a little grotto in a rocky islet like the others, at the entrance, a mound of sand—the tomb of the *congaie*.

Yet one can imagine Pierre Loti, a young lieutenant-commander serving aboard a training-ship named the *Bougainville* or the *Triton*, land-

ing here some evening at this hour of twilight, which lasts but a brief instant in the tropics. The steward or somebody on board, whom immediately for the charm of the story Loti would have made into an old Annamite with tapering fingernails or a Chinese pirate, would have remarked, on recognizing the islet:

"Look, lieutenant, there is the tomb of the *congaie.*"

And at once, without ever leaving the deck, eyes fixed on space, the inspired sailor would have brought to life the dead maiden. A whole delicately attenuated tale would have been born. I actually seem to read it.

The warm breeze, laden with intoxicating perfumes, the limpid water expiring on the beach, the little hut covered with banana-leaves, and the *congaie,* dressed in a soft tunic, her face illuminated by a mysterious smile, playing with rose-colored shells. She recognizes the young officer in white, who had surprised her as she was modestly bathing behind the rocks, and her cheeks grow red under their saffron. Now, seated together at the foot of a flamboyant-tree in flower, holding hands, they teach each other charming words.

They will be happy, far from the world and the

maneuvers of the fleet. At night, when the great velvet butterflies begin to wake, she will sing to him ancient airs, accompanying herself on the cithara. She will kiss him in the fashion of the girls of Annam, pressing her little nose against his face and breathing hard, as if she were smelling a flower, and she will give him a pretty name, for herself alone, like Minh, which means My Own, My Precious. Nothing will indicate the passing of time except now and then the fall of an overripe mango.

Then an unforeseen crisis, an expedition into Chinese waters! When the young officer returns, half forgetful, half remembering, he will discover his little wife a wasted shadow, hands burning, shaken by an evil cough. And some evening, at the hour of the *hibou,* the owl, stretched out on her little bed of moss, she will go away, with soft eyes that seem to be asking forgiveness for dying.

A delicious and heartrending story Loti would have made out of an adventure like mine, a story that after a while he would have come to believe he had actually lived!

I used to love, and still admire, this great poet who saw things only through an enchanted prism, and whose whole life as a sailor was spent in making journeys he had dreamed of as a little boy.

He did not discover countries; he recaptured memories so vivid that he still thought himself dreaming as he ran about the world. He did not wish to see the hideous reality, which repelled him; and when, now and then, it forced itself on his attention, he wrote in disillusionment:

"Ce pays des rêves, pour lui garder son prestige, j'aurais dû ne pas le toucher du doigt. . . . La civilisation y est trop venue aussi, notre sotte civilisation coloniale, toutes nos conventions, toutes nos habitudes, tous nos vices, et la sauvage poésie s'en va. . . ."

Nearly fifty years ago it was that he wrote in this vein. He refused to see "stupid civilization" at work. The colonies, the islands, should be as the child with the Gipsy soul dreamed them, in the old house at Rochefort.

The truth is ugly? What matter! He turns away from it. In his writings he creates another world more real than the actual, and by the sole trick of his genius, out there in the tropics there will exist for a half-century mysterious countries known only to him, lands of which, in their turn, other young vagabonds in other Rocheforts will dream and cross the seas to visit, only to find themselves deceived when they lay hands upon the dream.

Magnificent trumpery. Everything he approached he embellished. The Annamese hours —I know them well enough: hour of the dog, hour of the boar, hour of the rat. But he assuredly would have none of these; he would have written "hour of the owl." And thus, without concern for commonplace truth, he would have told the story of the *congaie* as I have given it.

In the bay of Along there are neither flamboyants nor flowers, neither mangoes nor velvet butterflies. More is the pity; he would have created them! And the name—do you believe he would have let the *congaie* keep her own? Never. Like her comrades, she would, in reality, be called Crab, Dung, Prostitute (I dare not give worse possibilities!), a very ugly surname, chosen for the purpose of scaring away the devils. Loti would have baptized her Little Hyacinth, even at the cost of attracting the *makouis,* the bad spirits. Nor would he ever in the world have consented to show her scaling fish on a junk, dressed in brown rags and chewing betel; she would have had to be graceful and crowned with flowers. And so, in distant Asia, another amorous dream, charming sister of Madame Chrysanthème and of Rarahu, would have come into existence.

Everything is transfigured in the work of Loti. If he takes a walk in Constantinople, every veil hides a mystery. If he gets into a motor-boat, it becomes a *caïque*. He sees monkeys in Agra, discovers gigantic statues in galleries where one may touch the ceiling, encounters cannibals in the suburbs of Papeete, at Angkor thinks he sees slashes six or seven feet long on the tree-trunks, where tigers have come to sharpen their claws. Wherever Loti passes, the magic wand is raised.

Was he right? Is the truth so ugly that it should never be shown naked? No doubt since he had the ability to create a world after his own heart, he was justified in doing so. But what a shabby figure the poor fellow makes who comes trailing along after him, with only a sprig of truth in his sack!

So my uncertainty regarding the duty of the narrator—to describe or to invent—remains unsettled. It is a choice that divides not only two forms of art but two types of men, and Buridan's ass was less perplexed between his bucket of water and his oats than is the writer sometimes between the inexorable reality and alluring fiction.

Impatient Reader: Well, and this *congaie?* What are we to believe?

AUTHOR: This is very annoying! I wanted to be agreeable and give a pleasant twist to my story, but I am not allowed to.

READER: Well?

AUTHOR: Well, if the truth must be told, she had black teeth and smelled fishy.

CHAPTER VI

FROM JUNKS TO THE MINE

SINCE my memories have taken me back to Along Bay and I have again in dream retraced Henriette Passage and sailed through the maze of reefs and little islands, I should like, before forgetfulness comes on apace, to pause once more at Cat-ba Island, where we stopped one evening.

Its somber mass drew my attention while we were yet some distance away, and I decided that we would spend the night here. It is a rocky stretch of land dominated by a high peak, and its arid sides are pierced by caverns that but a little while since afforded refuge to pirates. Tiny islands break the surrounding sea into froth. Cat-ba, which means Abyss of Sand, is populated solely by Chinese, who live by fishing or selling things to fishermen. There are only two Frenchmen here: the customs official, whose little ocher-walled fortress rises at the end of the bay,

and the wireless operator, whose house is on the summit.

The wife of the customs official, who spends her time making slips from her flowers and raking her garden-paths, finds life at Cat-ba as comfortable as in a provincial corner of France. The singular setting does not even astonish her, and she has ceased to think of danger. Chatting away, she told me that the other day a python fifteen feet long was killed behind her house. Inside its body, as if skewered, were three small kids it had just swallowed. She is always finding snakes lurking in the woodpile, and she kills them with a spade. By this time she is familiar with all the different kinds of animals, and she laughs heartily at the queer tricks, especially those of the monkeys. One morning last week she attended, in her own garden, military maneuvers of those same *bandar-logs* that stirred Kipling's enthusiasm.

At a given cry from one of them, they came scampering, bounding, leaping, from behind rocks, from the midst of the tangled undergrowth, advancing upon the village. The offensive was so sudden that it left speechless the few Chinese who were about in their gardens. Some eighty in all, crowned with an identical white tuft, they came

on in little bands and sections, each one apparently knowing its own objective. Before the alarm could be given, before a single Chinese had had time to arm himself, the monkeys were masters of the situation. In the wink of an eye, they pillaged everything, despoiled every last tree and bush. Then, barking like a pack of hounds, they triumphantly retreated to the heights, loaded with papayas, oranges, and bunches of bananas, which they carried on their backs.

"They were comical, monsieur, you cannot imagine how comical, marching along on the other side of the hedge. There was one big fellow who made such faces at me, scurrying along and stuffing bananas all the time, that I was nearly sick laughing at him."

What a victory, all the same, for the free tribe! Does not a plan of attack like that reveal the genius of a great leader? No doubt the *coup* is still talked of, in the evenings, under the high branches of the trees of Cat-ba.

> Now we are talking just like men.
> Let's pretend we are . . . Never mind!
> *Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!*

Many other animals haunt the steep rocks of the island and come crowding even into the

houses. But an adjustment takes place. The rats eat the rice, the snakes eat the rats, the Chinese eat the snakes!

The village is constructed on the mud-flats at the edge of the sea, and at high tide the waves beat against the piles of the houses. The one street, between two rows of hovels built of wood, plaster, and mud, is poorly paved, evil-smelling, and filled up with rubbish. The pagoda is no less sorry-looking than all the rest—an empty altar, an oven in a corner and, on the worm-eaten door, strips of red paper with various official communications. The men read them, squatting down on the ground, queues clipped in Chinese post-revolutionary style.

Merchants and fishermen alike dress in blue overalls, such as workmen wear at home, and go dragging through the night-soil where black pigs wallow and small quarrelsome dogs pick fights with one another. As soon as we turn around, a troop of ragged gamins run at top speed, only to gather again at a safe distance and follow us once more with their jabber; it is not often that they have the good fortune to see savages so close.

The houses gape on the street, little more than flimsy partitions. Here balls of cooked rice, scraps of meat, *areca*-nuts, are being sold. Next

door the whole equipment needed by fishermen is to be found, plus strips of cotton cloth. A Chinese lying in a bunk is smoking opium, turning the balls in the flame of a bazaar lamp. Nothing suggests vice; near him his wife is washing clothes, and her little boy, pencil between fingers, industriously traces ideographs. A picture of family life.

These folk live as their neighbors, the fishermen of Hainan, have lived for centuries. Most of them, no doubt, are ignorant of the fact that here they are on French soil. The only ruler they acknowledge is the village headman. A Chinese doctor looks after them with herbs; a sorcerer takes care of them with a lot of noise. They are quite at home.

A fearful smell of putrid fish hangs over the village and the shore. It is the smell of their work, their money, their life. Fish, everywhere fish. There are thousands of them spread out to dry, like the wash, on the junks. The holds are packed full of them, and an unnamable liquid oozes from the casks in which *nuoc-man* is being made. The very mud smells of brine!

Fortunes are to be made here, and the junks that go back to Canton after the fishing are a famous temptation to the pirates who still inhabit

the China Seas. Every season, on the return journey, vessels are attacked. The crews know well enough that the corsairs are without mercy and that after the pillage they will send everybody to the bottom, and hence desperate combats sometimes take place at sea.

On the terrace of the fort, fifty cannons of all ages and calibers are piled helter-skelter in a cradle of oleanders and Japanese lilacs. This is the artillery belonging to the junks. As soon as they enter French waters, they are disarmed and all firing-equipment taken away. Then when the fishing is finished the guns are remounted on their carriages and primed, a lookout is posted, and the ship's head is turned due east.

There is nothing alarming about these old rusty cannons, overgrown with weeds; just the same it is not advisable to laugh at them. During the war one of them, charged to the muzzle, at one shot destroyed twenty-two pirates who stood massed on the deck of a boat, sabers in hand, on the point of attacking another vessel.

As the customs official recounted these tales to me, his wife, whom I was pitying for having to live in this isolation, remarked naïvely:

"You see, distractions are not wanting."

At the end of the day I went back to my little

steamer. Leaning on the taffrail, I watched the shore being swallowed up in mist. Around us clustered massive junks, huge eyes painted on the prows wherewith to discover reefs, mat sails hanging limp from the yards. Everything was at rest.

The customs fort now seems to melt away. Already the jetty of great rough stones is no longer discernible against the dark water. Night falls silently. Lanterns are lighted on the boats and plunge their trembling reflections into the sea. The village lights up; suddenly the darkness is pricked full of luminous holes. Brightest of all is the shepherd star—the open door of the custom-house. And now I search the horizon for the Southern Cross, which each night hangs out its lamps awry.

How strange is this unfamiliar, tropical sky! Without realizing it, we guard the image of the constellated dome of European nights. When we have passed to the other side of the world, our vision loses itself in this new sky, where we no longer find the accustomed stars in their accustomed places, but others, curiously grouped, of which we shall never know the names. Time slips by; thoughts are stripped from the mind and will not come again.

Suddenly I start. A metallic crash has broken the silence, the sound of a gong, the beating of a drum. From that junk over there the call comes. Instantly from a neighboring boat it is taken up, and then from another nearer shore, and still another; soon a deafening clamor sounds across the water, the charivari of a fête. What is happening?

Lights have fallen into line on shore, and I see lanterns joining together, forming a procession. When the noise of the gongs ceases for an instant, I strain my ears and catch a confused murmur of voices, the distant shouting of a crowd, coming from the village. Nothing is to be seen from the steamer but moving lights, until an illuminated sampan detaches itself from the jetty. Others follow, and the strange procession moves toward the anchored junks. A shrill voice chants, and from time to time the crowd responds, with a beating of gongs. A flute too sings like a bird.

As the procession unwinds, the boatmen drop little lights into the sea. They drift about until presently the whole anchorage is like an immense pond where float a hundred nocturnal water-lilies, red, green, and blue: prayers of light to the gods hidden under the waters. When it has made the tour of the fishing-fleet, the procession returns to

shore. The line of lanterns once more passes along the jetty and then disperses. The voices die away; the flute is still. Now the fishermen are ready to leave, reassured that the gods will fill their nets.

The first junk glides past and out to sea, a great black shape with mat sail faintly swelling. Others follow, mysterious, without lights. Aft in the cabins, one hears the screeching of fowls, kids, pigs; the whole household is setting forth. Now and then a gong still trembles like a retreating storm.

Only a few lights still float on the waves. One by one they go out; only two are left; only one—and now it too is gone. Who could have blown it out?

Darkness has conquered the sea. Occasional lanterns still keep watchful eyes open on the anchored junks. In the middle of the little bay, the gleaming door of the custom-house. To the right the faint glimmering of the huts. And across the sky at regular intervals the sweep of a beacon-light.

As I lie stretched on my couch, I reflect on how soothing these airy nights are, after the suffocating nights of the delta. My thoughts wander among all the scattered sounds; I listen to the

life of the junks. The women who have things to sell pass from boat to boat in their little sampans like floating cradles with roofs of thatch, crying their fruits, their cooked rice, their dainties. All the itinerant people of the world—of China, of Paris—have their special cries. Now the modulated song of the soup-vender ("Balls of clouds! Balls of clouds!" says her long-drawn cry) mingles in my memory with the plaintive call of Mère Mouton, waking me so often on the care-free mornings of Butte Montmartre. Other hours, the same heart!

The cries separate, draw near, become confused. At the stern of each sampan is a boy who sculls. Suddenly a man shouts something from the deck of a junk—uncomplimentary epithets, hurled in his own dialect. He is having an altercation with the vender of cooked chestnuts. But gradually I hear less and less well. The voices lull me. My thought grows numb.

The door of my cabin, open to the deck, frames a corner of the night. As I fall asleep I seem to see a star rising, ascending the invisible mountain. Yes, it is the French wireless operator, going home, preceded by his boy carrying the lantern. The crumbling path, thorny lianas, snakes, panthers? To be sure. But to see a man

like himself, to laugh, to talk, to sit under a lamp, think only of the moment, feel that he is again in France, at home!

Slowly, slowly, the star climbs upward.

Still in the same little steamer, we cross an arm of the sea and find ourselves at Hongay, where the coal-mines are. Cat-ba is Old Asia, Hongay is civilization: you may take your choice.

They are unique, I think, those mines of Hongay. The coal is taken directly from the surface of the ground; Campha, Hatu, Monplanet, great segments of amphitheaters dug out of the hills. Gigantic black staircases lead up to the sky, so smooth, so straight, that the coal seems to have been cut away in slices, like an immense cake. Nothing is on a human scale. Everything is too high, too vast, and the natives, laboring on these slopes, are nothing but human dust on the steps of jet. The road leads from one quarry to the next, following along the sea, cutting through villages, ascending to passes, traversing forests.

"Who owns all these lands, my good man?"

"The Marquis of Carabas."

But this is not the story of "Puss in Boots." The Marquis of Carabas of this domain is represented by the coal company of Tongking. The

company owns everything—fields, woods, houses, roads, and all that lies underneath. This railway belongs to it, this port, these jetties, these navigable channels, this church with pointed bell-tower, this great covered market, belong to it. Everything down to the last straw on fifty thousand acres belongs to it. If a village is in the way, so much the worse; it is razed. And when it is built up elsewhere, the native pays part of the cost of his new hut; thus tied to the ground, he will not leave it.

For this is the most difficult problem: to find the coolies, thousands of them, get them to Hongay, and then prevent them from running away. Everything has been tried. Nothing works. As soon as a Tongkingese has a few piasters in his purse, he quits work and returns to his rice-fields. At the Annamese New Year, which falls about harvest-time, all wish to return to their villages, and it is then that they escape by the thousands. The combined efforts of the overseers are useless; within a few days the excavations are deserted.

What is to be done? All sorts of schemes have been tried. Wages are not paid until the middle of the succeeding month, so that the coolies, eager for what is due them, are obliged to stay on. Meanwhile in order to keep them from starving

or requiring charity, the company turns over to them, if they have worked well, one piaster every ten days. This is what is called making an "advance." The great covered market and the moving-picture theater are further baits. It is surprising that a hospital has not yet been built.

One administrator of the company has found a tie in religion. It was his idea that missionaries, if established at the mine, would acquire a hold at least over Catholics. Accordingly an Annamite father of the Spanish mission was invited to come to Hongay. It is for him that the little church was erected; and already the new parish numbers seven hundred coolies. The goat grazes where it is staked; where the convert has his church, he prays. Without being aware of the fact, it is in the interest of the Marquis of Carabas that the Annamite father says mass.

When floods carry away the dikes of the Red River, devastating the rice-fields, and famine descends upon the delta, whole villages of *nhaques* pour into the coal-fields, seeking sustenance no longer to be found at home. Then one may count as many as twenty thousand coolies between Campha and Nagotna. Those are the good years for the mine.

When I visited Hongay, the black quarries

swarmed with laborers, thin-armed, ragged creatures at work with their picks. Among them were some women also, whose mouths, red with betel, gave an appearance of bleeding. Behind the small cars, the *nhos,* ten years old, with little dried-up bodies and drawn faces under their grime, were bending double.

"Fifteen cents a day," laconically remarked my guide.

The dust in which they work has incrusted their feet with coal, and their rags also are quite black. This is what has become of Tea-Blossom and Nguyen the Cowherd! No more lotus, or little shrines, or flowering hedges; modern work does not care for those fancies. No more bamboos in front of the tiny houses; only fence-posts. No more slender, straight *areca*-palms; only chimneys. This deafening roar comes from the sifters, and it is not incense that is smoking but burning coal-bricks. Hard coal, tar, and soft coal. O exotic East!

Transport to the shore of the China Seas a French township of the thirteenth century and dig a mine there; that is Hongay. When the motor-car, blowing its horn, enters a street, old serfs bow effusively, leaning on their bamboo sticks. The *ba-gia,* old women, retreat into their

hovels. But the Chinese merchant, on the contrary, comes out to the door-sill of his shop and smiles with all his white teeth; he is with us, the masters. Hardly is a new vein opened, a new pit dug, scarcely have the first coolies arrived, before the Chinese turns up with his four sticks, his rice-bowls, and his stock of provisions. Not a single blow of a pick has been given before he is on the spot, freshly barbered, laughing good-naturedly. He will be rich long before any of the others, the clever fat fellow. For him, and for those like him, Indo-China is only a Chinese colony, managed by the French.

Who, after all, is master here? A mandarin? These coolies would never attract one; the court at Hué scorns them. A French functionary? There is just one police officer, pompously decorated with the title of commissary. The sole master is the mine.

Everything that I can see from the ridge of the hill belongs to the mine, including the broad bay, in which millions of francs have been swallowed up in an attempt to construct an impossible port. It is for the mine that the deck-hands work on the cargo-boats, that the Tongkingese ply their picks in the quarries, that the Mans, with their long hair twisted up in a knot, explore the virgin forest,

searching out new coal-fields. Cranes extend their indefatigable arms of iron the whole length of the wharf. Trains are loaded and emptied endlessly. New villages spring out of the ground, with houses all alike, built in rows. All this is for the mine. And the mine itself produces everything it has need of: its flatboats, its tools, its boilers, even the rice eaten by its coolies.

It is exceedingly rich. Last year its net profits amounted to twenty-nine million francs; that is, more than the capital. Nearly twenty millions of acknowledged reserves, extra shares distributed to the shareholders, stock originally quoted at two hundred and fifty francs a share now selling at from seven to ten thousand. The sixty-four thousand shares that at issue stood for sixteen millions to-day are worth more than half a billion!

One wonders how much this kingdom of coal brings to Indo-China, to France. The answer is —nothing. I refuse to count the few francs of nominal taxation, the few cents of mining-tax. It is the same with the coal-mine as with the greater number of rich enterprises in Indo-China: powerful unknown persons divide the profits and suck up the honey, and the colony gets nothing, and France, who has paid for this land with so

much blood, gets nothing. At least Hongay produces its coal for the benefit of Indo-China, it may be said. Not even that. Nearly all of it goes to Japan, which pays a good price, while Saigon clamors in vain. Our factories must pass their orders on to Cardiff, and the railways burn wood, with the result that the forests are being devastated. Hongay brings us neither money nor coal, nothing but the hatred of thousands of coolies.

Over to the south, behind Cat-ba humping its buffalo-back, behind the blue hills of Dong-trieu, the Cua-cam empties its thick red waters into the gulf. Fifty years ago when Francis Garnier was fighting at Hanoi, our first cannons passed this way. It was here, ten years later, that the sea-wolves and sailors of Henri Rivière disembarked, to be massacred soon after on the road to Sontay. It is by this mangrove-bordered channel that pale youngsters, the soldiers of Courbet and of Négrier, took the road to Lang-son and Tuyen-kwang. The conquerors! In vain I look for their eyes among the islands scattered in Along Bay, the islet of the Cimetière, where a few nameless sailors repose under the sand. The conquerors! Later still, how many eager young men, dressed in white and wearing white helmets, came push-

ing past Haiphong, where the first houses had sprouted round the barracks, thinking that fortunes attended them in the fatal swamps of the delta or in the forests of the Haute Région. The conquerors!

What was the gain of all these? Was Pierre Loti right when he doubted the greatness, the stability, of these distant conquests, and when he wept for the thousands of soldiers whose precious lives should never have been risked *"que pour les suprêmes défenses de notre cher sol français?"* No, the dreamer was mistaken. The figures are there to answer him: half a billion in shares, roughly, thirty-two million francs in gross profit.

CHAPTER VII

MOTOR TROUBLE IN THE TAM-DIEP

THE motor-car pants asthmatically. The engine knocks. The old machine labors painfully, racked and shaken like a tired horse. Surely it can go no farther. A little anxious, in spite of myself, I look around. Jungle, enormous black rocks, not a dwelling, not a rice-field, not a hedge, nothing to indicate the proximity of a village. For more than an hour we have not seen a living soul, and now night has come on and we find ourselves in a deserted region.

Where are we? Impossible to say exactly. I have no road-map, and, when I question my Annamite chauffeur, who is clutching the wheel, he looks at me in a frightened way and mutters something inarticulate, I know not what. Surely he must be afraid that I am going to beat him. Too bad that I am not irritable; for it is he, the wretch, who has got me into this mess.

When I asked him at Hanoi, "Can you drive me to Vinh?" he did not hesitate a moment.

"Me can do," he affirmed.

And I was stupid enough to believe him. By this time I ought to begin to know them. Chauffeurs, boys, coolies, they are all alike. Whether from self-interest or conceit, not one will admit that he is ignorant of anything, that there is anything he cannot do. Twenty times I have had the experience of coming out of a hotel and having a crowd of rickshaw-boys rush up all at once to the edge of the sidewalk, the last one shoving those in front with the shafts of his rickshaw, each offering me his little vehicle.

"Place de la Concorde!" I command.

All together, they shout, "Me savvy, me know!"

I pick one by chance, and he starts running at full speed as if he were perfectly sure of his way. After a while I stop him.

"Well? Are we going in the right direction for the Place de la Concorde?"

He does not understand me, but he has an idea that perhaps he is wrong. He keeps on running just the same, first to the right, then to the left, sometimes turning round to look at me with open mouth, only the strap of his peaked hat preventing his chin from dropping still lower. A better informed colonial would never have attempted to give him an address, but would simply have di-

rected him to the right turn, speeding him on now and then with a *"Maoulen!* Hurry up!"

Yet the next day there will be the very same coolie, or his like, shouting with effrontery, "Me savvy," when I ask to be taken to the Place Pigalle or to the Opéra. Anything to gain a few cents!

These rickshaw-runners are the most miserable, the least intelligent, of all the Annamites who serve us. I could never bring myself to use them for any great distance, however. It troubled me to see their skinny panting chests and their backs dripping with sweat. In vain I tried first one way of sitting and then another and drew up my knees in the hope of making my weight lighter; I succeeded only in throwing more weight on the shafts. The first time the poor devil looked back, surprising me in my cortortions, I would leave him then and there, paying double the price he asked.

Yet an Annamite "boy" is capable and ingenious enough. He can serve a dinner for twenty in a house without proper dishes, silverware, or linen; and he is so clever and so dissimulating that in spite of being on one's guard one is always being taken in by him.

I knew a young official who, new to his post, engaged a *bep,* or cook, on the recommendation of a

boy employed by one of his colleagues. At the first luncheon, this inventive *bep* served him, as entrée, fish with noodles sprinkled with grated cocoanut.

"So," said the novice to himself, "the local *cuisine.*"

Merely out of curiosity he sampled the dish, which proved rather tasteless. When for the second course his Annamite served him raw carrots stuffed with chopped meat, and, to finish off, a salad of cabbage-leaves, the young official was seized with a fixed suspicion.

"You savvy *bep?*" he demanded severely.

The servant replied with so much assurance and so many bows, invoking *Monsieur Résident* and *Madame Capitaine* with whom he had served, that his master permitted himself to be convinced. The next day he got fish-curry very well prepared and rice cooked to a T, and even in a *salmis* of pheasant and tinned kidney-beans he had nothing to complain of. Unhappily, for dinner, after a passable soup, the jester with long hair twisted into a knot put down on the table a dish that spoiled everything—something utterly impossible, like tripe with preserves or an *escalope à la vinaigrette* garnished with boiled radishes. This time the master was decidedly annoyed. He

shook his cane and shouted, and, making an inquest, learned that his cook—"Me savvy, me know"—had been until then second boy with a police official and had adopted his trade of *bep* without qualifications, simply because he wanted to earn twenty piasters a month instead of twelve.

It must have been with this same police officer, I fear, that my chauffeur learned his trade. He drives like a lunatic, exactly as a blind man, frightened to death, might handle a runaway horse; every turn is suicidal. A little while ago I ordered him in exasperation to stop and examine his carburetor, but all he could do was to lift the hood and fall into contemplation before the motor as if he had discovered the strange machine for the first time. I expected him to make *lays* to it. But we start on, after endless cranking, and now we are proceeding again, jolting and bouncing, the chauffeur paralyzed, the engine wheezing, the passenger disgruntled. Thus for who knows how long!

It is only now, at night-time, that the man and the machine have given way, as if overcome by fear. Up to now the journey has been unfolding monotonously through the interminable rice-fields stretching from Hanoi to Ninh-binh. They blind you, those great sheets of ooze, with the sun

striking them. If you take off your dark glasses for one instant you cannot stand the glare of the hard light; and the sky itself hurts, a sky quite flat and colorless but shining like nickel. As night comes on, however, the rice-fields are transformed. They deck themselves for a moment with melancholy charm. Roses, under the dying sun; some like tarnished mirrors. And the Tongkingese, hurrying along the dikes, their poles across their shoulders, reflect their small shadows in the water as if they were posing for a photographer. It is almost too picturesque; it seems retouched.

The rice-fields give place to a mournful waste, and I watch a chain of blue hills looming up. We are entering the Tam-diep. It is a region of chaos where nothing grows but meager brush; no undulations, no craggy slopes. Strange mountains shoot up abruptly like rocks from the sea. "The terrestrial Along Bay," the place is called. Here are, in truth, the same tortured forms, the same rocks slashed by the sea.

Night spreads round us like a black ocean. It is like floating through a strait, with the tops of fifty little islands emerging above the surface. The road seems narrower, the car lower, the sky more somber. It produces in one an uncanny sensation, to roll on endlessly like this, between

stone phantoms. In a patch of moonlight, a few obscure huts, a small pagoda, quite black, a godless altar; now once more nothing but brush in which panthers hunt.

What are we to do if the motor stops? No arms, no lantern, no guide. Never would this frightened fool of a chauffeur be capable of conducting me to a village, a post, a shelter of any kind. Is there any such thing in this land of desolation? Shall I await daylight in the car, sounding the horn from time to time, as a signal and to keep away the wild beasts? Shall I build a fire with gasolene, take the largest tool out of the box to defend myself in case of danger? In books of adventure, you roll up in your poncho near a log fire and go to sleep, with your eyes on the stars. But the stars suddenly have acquired less interest for me than my headlights, which are growing dim, and I have neither poncho nor dry wood. The determination to reach Vinh at all costs now strikes me as a piece of unutterable folly.

The road, on account of the rains, is in very bad condition. Bridges have broken down; embankments have fallen away. Suddenly, without warning, comes a sharp turn, a hair-pin bend between two ditches. A double jerk at the wheel,

blindly given, and our headlights glare into nothing! Once, at full speed, we broke through a hedge of branches barring the road, got past somehow, jounced from a hole to a heap of stones, and found ourselves, thoroughly shaken up, on the other side of the danger-zone. Farther on, my Annamite failed to see trouble ahead until the last instant and then savagely took a chance, rushing across a temporary bridge thrown over a brook beside the old one. Just a few feet to one side, and we should have rolled into the ravine.

Now as if done for by these two efforts, the exhausted car advances only by jumps, dragging along laboriously. One cylinder has ceased to work. Occasionally, going downhill, we recapture a semblance of vitality and shoot forward explosively; immediately after, out of breath, the machine slows down, and I hear its heart beat with a rattle of old iron. It is a death-rattle.

Behind us the great rocks still stand out in startling silhouette in the greenish night. They are like a formidable array of monoliths, fragments of mountains, thrown on the waste at random. Just as I am beginning to wonder whether I am destined to pass the night in this tragic setting, the final death-rattle comes; a great jerk,

and the car stops. I jump out and look around. Nothing but blackness. Now that the engine is quiet, an oppressive silence fills this haunted country.

A stalled car, two lost men and the menacing jungle. I strain my ears in vain; not a crackle, not a sound. How solitary it is! How far does this obscure heath extend? I interrogate the night but get no answer. Why does my Annamite remain silent, glued to his wheel? Does he foresee danger? I walk nervously up and down, climb some kind of slope, come back to the car. Finally the poor lonely sound of my footsteps makes me fidgety and I stop. My shadow bothers me too. It often frightens me, this black apparition that I have watched grow with myself, dragged along so many roads, seen change in outline so many times. I shake myself. Come, this is no hour in which to meditate. And above all, not on the ultimate end. What if I get back in the car, close the doors, and arm myself with one of the tools? That would seem to be a prudent idea.

Just as I was about to put it into execution, I unexpectedly heard a noise only a few yards away. My heart thumped. Instinctively I blotted

myself against the car. Keeping my eyes out for danger, I felt about the seat, hoping to find a pair of forceps, any kind of tool, something.

"Hullo, there!"

My surprise was so great that I did not move. Some one was hailing us!

"Are you stalled?" the voice demanded.

A Frenchman! Whoever it was he had not emerged from the dark when my Annamite, quite cheered up, was out of the car. As for myself, too astonished for words, I watched a hairy planter approach, a poorly dressed settler. Under any other circumstances the man would have put me on my guard, but now I spontaneously held out my hands to him.

The new arrival did not seem particularly surprised to find us there. "Well! You can still make it," he said to me. "The train is just half an hour late; you will catch it."

I had thought myself lost in the jungle, delivered over to wild beasts; and here I found myself not much more than three hundred yards from the station of Bim-son, where an Annamite employee received me with bows and the little girls of the inspector of the native guard, dressed in white, examined me with big curious eyes as they waited for their mama.

Of course I was glad at the turn of events, but all the same, when I found myself on the platform, with my luggage piled round me, and the native station-agent offering to send a telegram to the residency, I felt a trifle ridiculous. I confess I was annoyed. Where was my adventure? The jungle, the gasolene flare, the night on guard, the big tool to defend myself with? Was the whole picture merely the imagination of a coward?

Thanks to my planter, honor was saved.

"Infernal country, you know," he said, as he put me on the train. "Better not be out at night. A tiger was around again this morning and carried off one of my calves."

Ong cop, my lord the tiger, the Annamites obsequiously call him. He is often spoken of in Indo-China, but, thank heaven, he is not often encountered. It is wise to discount those travelers' tales that are filled with roarings and with leaping animals, intrepid adventurers who throw themselves face foremost into thorny bushes to escape a mad buffalo, who pass hours astride a branch, besieged by elephants, and who would have been devoured by a tiger had they not had the courage to regard him fixedly in the eyes and inject fear into him.

There are tigers in Indo-China, plenty of them, perhaps as many as there are boars in France, but there as here you have to be a hunter to meet them. Rarely does a tiger bound on top of the hood of an automobile, as in the case of the lady going to Dalat, who thereafter vowed that she would never again venture out by night along the roads in that vicinity.

Sometimes one hears a tiger calling in the forest; often its terrible footprint is pointed out on the ground. In every village you will be told that a dog, a hog, a horse, even a buffalo, has been carried away by *ong cop,* or that a native has been devoured. But a tiger does not commonly venture into a place where people are living. It is only when he has grown old, when his stiff paws do not permit him to chase deer any more, that he risks himself on the edge of villages, to feed, if necessary, on cattle or men. Moreover he does not attack any save solitary persons; a woodcutter in the forest, a *nhaque* on his way to his hut at night, a Moi woman returning to her mountain from her rice-field.

"The tiger is a coward," great hunters maintain.

Perhaps. But the manner in which transient

Europeans are conducted on tiger-hunts does not authorize them to be very severe in their judgments. Nothing less heroic than those expeditions can well be imagined. If you have piasters and a gun, you will get a tiger. Even the rifle is not absolutely essential; you can borrow one—not the piasters. The forest ranger to whom you will be referred if you are somebody of mark—a young man with a friendly face who has already killed fifty wild elephants and as many felines—will satisfy himself briefly concerning the caliber of your arm and your qualities as a hunter. Then he will advise you about your costume and your boots. After a conversation comprising not more than fifty words, he will send you back to the hotel, saying, "I will send you word." The tiger has been ordered; nothing remains for you to do but wait.

The palace at Dalat is comfortable: perfect *cuisine,* strawberries in winter, a good-sized lake under the windows, motion-pictures on Saturdays. While you play tennis or go on picnics along the shores of the Camly, morning and evening Moi trackers from the hotel go to see if the tiger has visited the kill they have left for him under the trees, a buffalo with a gashed belly. When his

feeding-hours have been ascertained, for this wild beast is as methodical as a tom-cat, they will let you know.

"Monsieur, this is the day."

Bearing off with you like a talisman the admiring glances of the pretty women, you get into a motor-car. Presently you get down again. You go three hundred yards through the woods, and you stop behind a screen of foliage, twenty yards from the carrion.

"See; he will appear at that point."

The remark is made in muffled tones as a hole between two bushes is pointed out. The putrefying buffalo gives off a horrible smell: this indeed is the greatest danger in the whole expedition. Silence now. As night comes on, the darkening forest is animated with singular sounds, crackling in the underbrush, sharp cries in the branches. Now and then you think you see two phosphorescent eyes. Or fireflies perhaps? In any case, do not shoot. Wait.

Soon you are surrounded by a cloud of mosquitos that sting you on the face, the feet, the hands, through your clothes, everywhere. You scratch, shake your head, smash them with blood-stains on your breeches. If, in an effort to kill one, you happen to give yourself too violent a

clap on the cheek, the great hunter becomes annoyed and taps you on the shoulder. "See here, no noise. Is it tigers or mosquitos that you have come to hunt?" Meanwhile the accursed insects crawl down your neck and through the eyelets of your boots and leave you no peace. They are in my opinion the bravest creatures in the world. Without tusks, without claws, without a shell, at the mercy of a fillip, they never abandon their prey, never refuse combat. If the tiger had the ferocity of the mosquito, no one would dare attack it. Courage of this sort is often a virtue of the weak.

You have time to reflect on this and on plenty of other things. But suddenly you are given a warning through a mere pressure of the hand. You have heard nothing, but you look, all eyes. Your heart beats a little faster, in spite of yourself. You watch, standing very straight, rifle ready. All of a sudden the underbrush parts. It is he! He is coming out from the bushes, noiselessly. Magnificent!

The rifle-sight is adjusted. The tiger, turning his head, comes on, supple and slow. He is directly in line.

"Fire! Fire!"

Two shots ring out, two quick flashes, two

thrusts on the shoulder—and all is over. The tiger lies stretched at the edge of the clearing, not so big now, with long claws thrust out. Or perhaps he had time, with one supreme bound, to disappear in the underbrush. In that case, do not look for him. One can die of that sort of curiosity.

The next day you will have your tiger skinned like a rabbit, and triumphantly you will take back the trophy in a gasolene-tin filled with coarse salt, not knowing exactly what to do with it. At Saigon nobody will admire you much, because exploits like this are too common, and at Paris no one will believe you. But just the same, you will be the man who has "shot tigers."

It is true that there is more dangerous hunting, involving long watches in the forest, wild cattle pursued for days in the valley of the Lagna, elephants charging in herds. I have known rugged men who, for the sake of pleasure, more than once have stared death in the face. On the way to Phan-thiet a cross marks the place where a native chancellor of the district, when he was coming home on horseback one evening, was attacked and killed by a tiger. In another place an officer, seizing by the throat a panther that jumped on the neck of his mount, succeeded in strangling it

as the cat mauled him mortally in the stomach, while his horse dashed off through the woods. On another occasion a wounded tigress jumped with a bound on seven hunters, inflicting injuries upon all of them with a single stroke of her claws.

A hundred of these scarlet tales are to be recounted. Nevertheless, in retaliation perhaps for the fear that the tiger inspires, Annamites and Frenchmen prefer to joke about "monseigneur," as they call him in the south. If he has a striped belly, it is because he has had his hair burned with straw, mockingly say the *nhaques.* And the colonials, far too experienced to expatiate on the watches in the forest that astonish no one, more willingly tell of the adventure of a certain Cochin-China paymaster. Hunting with a night-light, he suddenly caught sight of eyes watching him through the bamboos, put his gun to his shoulder, fired two shots—and pierced the hood of his automobile, just between the headlights, which he had mistaken for the eyes of a tiger!

At a post in the valley of Song Hieu, where the women wear their hair like horns and hold it in place with wooden hair-pins, I was told that an inspector of the constabulary had had strong bars placed in his windows so that he could keep them

open on hot nights, and now it was the tigers—O revenge—who came to see the whites in a cage! This tale is not true of course, but tigers did show themselves often and in a neighboring village counted so many victims that the last of the inhabitants fled, taking the precaution to change their names so that *ong cop* should not find them again.

Is he an impostor? Is he brave? Is he bloodthirsty? How can any one say?

"Terrible," a young English major informed me at Colombo. This man's unique passion was hunting wild animals, and he wished to lose none of his prestige in the eyes of the young ladies with whom we were dining.

But in Tongking I knew a little French girl who made a pet of a tiger which she had brought up and which played about like a young dog. "Yes, but wait until it has once smelled blood!" croak the Tartarins, with a tragic sniffle. I am not so sure. My fearless little French girl—slender as a parasol and with pale cheeks—wished to test the truth of this belief one day. Having cut her hand, she thrust it, bleeding, under the mustache of her big cat. He smelled it and turned away his head in disgust. His mistress then smeared blood on his muzzle. With an air of being dis-

IN THE QUIET BACKWATERS OF OLD ANNAM—ON THE PHU-CAM CANAL NEAR HUÉ

tinctly annoyed, the tiger drew back and crouched in a corner, like a child pouting.

"Tigers brought up on the bottle! Circus tigers!"

Not in the least. A resident at Da-rlac kept a handsome two-year-old tiger in his house. It passed the days quietly lying across the stairs, and had to be chased off with a broom by the Moi servants, when it got in their way while they were cleaning. The resident-superior, who came to visit Ban Methuot one day, had the unpleasant surprise as he descended from his carriage of being welcomed by this inopportune beast, at the heels of its master. Excited by the brown shoes of the high personage, the tiger began to follow him, hitting at him gently as if playing with a ball. The resident-superior, in spite of himself, grew pale.

"Off with you, you wretch!" vainly cried the owner of the beast.

The official moved faster, with prudent little steps. By lunch-time, however, he had become somewhat accustomed to the tiger and was already giving it bones, as if it were a dog.

Not long after this, without any apparent reason, the erstwhile friendly beast suddenly one morning pounced on a black pig and a dog and

killed them both with one snap of the teeth. The official did not hesitate a moment; he took the guard's rifle and brought the animal down with a bullet in the middle of the forehead.

But that was a bad tiger, a flesh-eater thirsting after blood, a tiger of those red lands where the naked Mois live and feed upon half-raw buffalo. As the people are, so the animals! The inhabitants of Hanoi, on the other hand, tell you about the civilized and domesticated tiger of a celebrated colonial doctor, afterward a governor. In his spacious villa he kept this animal for years, to the astonishment of passers-by who watched it with terror as it played on the grass with the child of the house. At the siesta hour, the wheedling tiger used to come and sleep on his master's bed, stretched out and purring at his ease. No one ever disturbed the pair!

One day, noticing that his tiger had a bad eye, the doctor ordered one of his "boys" to go to the military hospital and get a certain salve that he specified.

"Me savvy!" the self-satisfied servitor replied.

He had understood so well—there were plenty of witnesses and they still talk of it in the little capital!—that he tied a rope round the neck of the tiger and led him to the hospital, holding him

in leash like a house-dog. Along his route the frightened Annamites fled or barricaded themselves in their houses, but the "boy" sauntered along and entered the court of the hospital in the most natural way, holding out his patient to an attendant, who promptly decamped. The whole hospital, the sick and the feeble, rose up as one man. Finally a major instructed the animal-trainer to return to his master by the shortest possible route. A small crowd had collected outside, but at a respectful distance. The tiger was tired, however, and refused to take another step; so he was put into a rickshaw and taken home, the "boy" continuing to hold the rope and a hundred yellow and white bumpkins accompanying him in a shouting procession.

And do you know how this tiger died? Through starvation, by refusing to eat, because he had been put in a cage during an illness of the child and because he could not live without his little friend.

So much for the Ananiases who have made me believe in the pitiless tiger, the tiger thirsting for flesh, the tiger licking reddened lips. During my whole sojourn in the Far East, I heard of but one white victim of wild beasts—a resident of Cambodia who, tearing along at the rate of nearly

a hundred kilometers an hour, plunged into a stag on the Kampong-thom road and was picked up with his ribs cracked, whereas his companion had both arms broken.

These are the dangerous beasts: the roebuck that appears in front of your limousine when it is too late to put on the brakes; the pig, the incompressible pig, that plunges out of the underbrush and upsets you; the domestic buffalo, stupidly blocking the way with horns lowered, which takes fright and goes lumbering off, abruptly stops and ends by forcing the car into the ditch. If any one should ask me what animals are most to be feared in Indo-China, I should unhesitatingly reply:

"The mosquito, because it stings, and the black pig!"

All this digression is here introduced simply because I happened to be stalled near the station of Bim-son and because a providential settler carried my valises to the train.

But had the car come to a stop twenty miles earlier, had I passed the night among the rocks of Tam-diep and suddenly seen a panther prowling about, or at least heard its call a few times before morning came, who knows how I should have felt.

STONE GUARDIANS AT THE IMPERIAL TOMBS OF ANNAM, NEAR HUÉ

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRONICLE OF THE BUFFALO'S EYE

THE oriental Versailles . . . Versailles and its quiescent waters, its vast square courts overgrown with weeds, its moss-grown balustrades, its deep shadows, its alleys, Versailles and its silence.

I arrived at the tomb of Tu-duc as day was drawing to a close. It is the hour to visit those far-away, royal sepulchers, up the River of Perfumes, bordered by luxuriant woods. Orientalists contend that the most beautiful of the mausoleums is that of Minh-mang; I prefer the one of Tu-duc. Perhaps it is less pure in line, but I came to it, after a leisurely walk along the upper road, in that hour of serenity when the mournful ponds give off their first mists, the moment when meditative human beings feel themselves closest to the dead.

The royal tombs of Asia are not the sad piles of stone familiar under our skies. One does not go to them to weep. Our cold chapels, made for

tears and for prayer, would not be suited to these great departed, put away in the earth without shroud or coffin, whose flesh has given its essence to the making of this green grass, these thickets where birds nest. The royal tomb is the last dwelling-place of the sovereign, his palace of rest to which he can return. He is awaited; here is the great bed of somber wood with its sheet and its cushions, here the tea, the rice, the *chum-chum,* set out afresh each morning; here are the betel leaves and the little jar of lime. And he will find again, arranged in glass cases, the jewels, the ornaments, the arms that he loved, the small jade trees, precious crystals, boxes of mother-of-pearl and those large Sèvres vases that ambassadors from France brought him as presents.

During the lifetime of the emperor a geomancer selected the site; and the buildings, fixed by rite in number and arrangement, were constructed here in this great garden: one inclosure for the mortal remains, a pavilion for the memory, a temple for the soul. Such was the conception of the sages who erected the mausoleums of the Mings and the Tsings outside of Peking, and the Annamite sovereigns have changed nothing.

These temples do not thrust themselves at the sky; they blend harmoniously with it. They do

not seek beauty in the elevation of vertical lines, like the classic art of Greece and of the Middle Ages. Their beauty lies in the lengthening of soft lines, the grace of colonnades and terraces, and the superimposed roofs nonchalantly spread along the horizon. Nothing is obtrusive except slender columns lost in vegetation—the symbolic brush of the scholar.

In the great court of honor, stone mandarins mount guard, with little caparisoned horses and with two elephants. On the roofs of glazed tiles and all along the granite stairs dragons unwind their coils. There are no costly materials, just bricks, broken bits of blue plates and even fragments of bottles, but everything becomes precious in this setting. Finials of faïence rise from the roofs like multicolored birds. And here and there gateways of bronze lift themselves with no other purpose than to frame the enamel of the melancholy trees leaning over the sleeping pools.

There is no point in looking for the grave. No one knows exactly where it is. It was dug within the vast inclosure that is planted with trees and surrounded by a sacred wall, whose sealed door is opened, for the fraction of a second, only once a year. But if the remains lie somewhere there, the spirit survives in the tablet to which one ren-

ders homage, the memory perpetuates itself in the massive stele, engraved with the high deeds of the reign. The immortal dead is less present in the mortuary garden than in these pavilions dedicated to his memory.

It is strangely moving to think that all this was constructed under the very eyes of the emperor, according to his own taste. Here he used to come for repose as to a pleasure-haunt, followed by a whole train of princes and dancers, of favorites and musicians; and when they all returned to the city by way of the river, the sound of flutes and drums accompanied them.

So, leaning on the edge of the pool where the baths of Tu-duc are falling to ruin, I dreamily regarded the worm-eaten pavilion with its decaying piles, and it seemed to me that something of the emperor still lived—less than substance, less than shadow—as in the time when he came here to rest and to watch the walls of his last palace begin to take shape. Frangipani flowers, smelling like lilies, were falling from the trees. The memory now comes back to me of great sanded courts, of greenish basins covered with water-lilies. But especially I recall standing, spellbound by its solemnity, on the threshold of a dark mysterious chamber. I was in the house of the soul, the

THE PRIME MINISTER OF ANNAM IN HIS EMBROIDERED ROBE OF STATE

temple of the tablet, the palace of the good deeds of the dead.

I entered, feeling my way. No light except the gold pin-prick of a night-light. I felt life around me but knew not whence came the strange, madcap voices that I heard, the disturbing laughter. Gradually red and gold lacquer emerged from the gloom, columns of somber wood, shimmering beams, glittering furnishings, glass cases. The voices still echoed around me, and suddenly I saw several very old women, the last of the servants of the dead wives of the emperor, left there to perform the rites of the cult. One other attendant there was, more hideous than the others, flabby and with flaccid cheeks—a eunuch.

Chattering and laughing, they show me the couch of the king, the ever-ready offerings on handsome inlaid platters, his favorite objects, the tall darkened mirrors in which, countless times, he must have gazed at his heavy silhouette; the quicksilver peeling off gives an odd suggestion of a human form drawn on a limpid background and framed in now tarnished wood. A sense of vague trouble, of uncertainty, comes over me. These women who have served him, this species of man who listened to his orders, these arms he handled! Did he not wear this heavy jade neck-

lace the very day he ordered the massacre of the last French missionaries? Nothing has moved around him. Life is as if suspended. Where are you, invisible master?

As I stood before the chief altar, veiled from profane eyes, I suddenly withdrew the hand that was about to lift the covering.

"No! Do not touch!"

There the precious relic is kept, the sacred handkerchief lifted by a dignitary to the lips of the dying sovereign, to receive the last breath, the escaping spirit. I had no wish to see it. And softly I left the ghostly palace of a breath, where now nothing survives but bleating voices and cracked laughter.

At all four of the imperial tombs the same stone mandarins attend in the funerary court, the same generals with their great swords and the advisers with their scrolls; and there are the same terraces with openwork balustrades, the same stairways with dragon slabs, the same colonnades and the same pavilions with superimposed roofs. But none of the other buildings or gardens offers the perfect harmony of the tomb of Minh-mang, the scholar emperor, lost in great pine woods where the wild elephants still roam. Here in the forest, behind the high wall of brick, you come suddenly

on a charming palace whose scattered edifices and pools bear fairy-like names—Shining Virtue, Venerated Deeds, Irreproachable Illumination, Magnetic Light.

Water everywhere. Water and flowers. The emperor wished, for his everlasting repose, a setting of tranquil water and perfume. Bridges span the lakes like rainbows; this one, flagged with marble, only the emperor himself might pass. Here is the Basin of the New Moon, crescent-shaped. Everywhere you come upon little streams, everywhere ponds aflower with lotus into which kingfishers dive, uttering sharp cries. Water even drips from the roofs, dampening the fine sand, where hundreds, thousands, of microscopic frogs smaller than grasshoppers hop about. As you climb stairs or pass along the colonnades, you are always stopping to lean over the water or to smell the flowers.

Everything is symbolic in this park: the two parallel bridges, representing the regents; the turtle of the three virtues, signifying Sky, Earth, and Water; the moon-shaped basin, protecting the entrance of the sacred inclosure, in which the rounded tumulus stands for the sun. High pillars of ironwood support the roofs, and under them are friezes sparkling with mother-of-pearl,

ivory, and gilt. All the incrustations represent inspiring thoughts. There is not a single pavilion in which the scholar emperor did not trace words of wisdom. Studying the plan of the garden, you suddenly perceive that the borders of the central pathway form the character *tho;* thus with flowers and shrubs Minh-mang wrote "eternity."

After wandering around the laughing sepulcher of Minh-mang, that of Gia-long, his father, comes as a surprise. It is not a tomb but a fort. Mirroring waters and gardens are appropriate for Minh-mang, expert lawmaker and adroit politician, but not for the sovereign of epics, for the great Gia-long, who, aided by the French, defeated the usurping Tay-son and grouped under his jade scepter all the countries of Annam, the first to reign from the frontiers of China to the banks of the Mekong. When he made his necropolis out of granite blocks, he seemed still to be thinking of future wars. He intrenched himself, in death, as in a citadel. No light foot-bridges or rich pavilions for him, but a rude structure of gray stone, with rows of severe temples and bare terraces.

His descendants, faithful to Chinese custom, are buried in a remote spot behind a sacred wall, so that their bones will not suffer disturbance. He did not share their fear. From the top of a

Gouvernment Généralàd'Indo-Chine

THE LATE EMPEROR KHAI-DINH AT HIS DESK IN HIS PRIVATE OFFICE IN THE PALACE, AND HIS SECRETARY

counterscarp, over the walls, one sees his tomb close to that of his queen, whom he still protects. Boldly he upholds his cuirass of stone: "It is I, Gia-long!" And he knows very well that no one will dare to touch him, that no battering-ram will ever hurl itself against the heavy bronze door.

He did not want rare woods, porcelain, enamel; only granite: no streams; but moats instead. The temple of the stele was never built. Gia-long does not need to have his great deeds inscribed; they are remembered. And at his tomb there are no blue-clad guards, obsequious and timid; there are tigers which at nightfall roam about in the great woods of wild fig-trees and come calling to the huts in the neighboring village of Dinh-mon.

Nothing in Indo-China has the charm of these tombs. The melancholy beauty of Old Annam lives on in them intact. Only in these delicious gardens can the traveler, free from any vulgar interference with his reverie, evoke the mysterious Asia of other times. It is the final refuge of the past, a marvelous picture made of red lacquer, moth-eaten fabrics, sleeping waters, and flowering frangipani-trees.

But let the visitor take care not to follow the impossible guide who will wish to conduct him to

the tomb of Dong-khanh, son of Tu-duc and father of the present king. If he does, the spell will be broken. The tomb is in the same style—there are the familiar gardens and pavilions with pointed roofs—but everything is spoiled by modernism and bad Occidental taste. The Emperor Dong-khanh was already "civilized." And his son piously sees to it that his tomb is kept in repair. Ironwood is replaced with cement and ancient lacquer with paint.

The visitor would also do well to refuse to go to the waterworks, in spite of the fact that the voluble cicerone will declare that it is "a little marvel in the style of the country." Or should he go, let it be only to have a good laugh.

I should like to know the facetious architect, the irresponsible official, who conceived the preposterous idea, in order not to injure the landscape of Hué, of erecting beside the river this astonishing waterworks, copied exactly from an Annamese temple but doubled in its proportions. It is such a *chef-d'œuvre* of stupidity that you think it must be a joke. The chimney is camouflaged in the form of a writing-brush, the portal is that of a pagoda, and the name is painted on the façade in Chinese characters. It is by way of retaliation, I take it, that in the heart of the royal

city, directly in front of the principal temple, a heavy modern building has been erected, the Treasury, of which a Munich plasterer would be ashamed.

One has to face facts. The years must pass, and inevitably Occidental civilization is going to gain headway. The old palace will surely lose its distinction. Already a clumsy iron bridge spans the river, and automobiles pass over it, blowing their horns; in the kiosk an Annamite orchestra plays "Poète et Paysan." Some day soon a street-car line will traverse the citadel, and an electric bell will be installed at the gate of the Forbidden Purple Inclosure. Let somebody discover oil in the neighborhood of Dinh-mon, and the sacred hills will be opened, the imperial tombs toppled over.

For a long time, however, the lovely countryside of Hué will not change. I am not the only one who, after visiting the Temple of Confucius, contemplating the golden faces of the Buddhas in its shadow, the statues of the grimacing tutelary deities in the portico, the high Chinese tower with its seven diminishing stories, suddenly has experienced an emotion not catalogued by the guides on seeing a boat-woman standing up in her sampan in the river which flows at the foot of the hill,

singing as she rows. It is not in the temple that Old Annam survives; it is in the wonderful landscapes. This woman, plying her oar, teaches me in one gesture more than the bronze Kwan-yin, the female Buddhist divinity, hidden in the depths of the pagoda.

In a little while the fishermen will come to take down their nets, like great black screens, hung out to dry on bamboo frames. Slender dugouts, overflowing with greens, will descend toward Phu-cam as day draws to a close. Night and silence will overhang the Hill of the Sacred Wind. Already the wooded slopes of the opposite shore are draped in mist, and the plain of Nguyet-bieu is no longer to be seen. The braziers are lighted beneath the sails of the little boats. Whither are they bound? What are they carrying?

A single star—a song!

Hué is a city of gardens, more like a large inhabited park than a capital. Wherein lies the secret of its faded but ever-renewed grace? Does it lie in its broad river and its canal, bordered with *nipa*-palms, in its flowery bungalows, its wide silent lanes, in the chimerical roofs of its palaces, the splendid girdle of its forests? Even its market-place is unlike other market-places; it has

French High Commission

A SCENE IN HUÉ, SHOWING THE TYPICALLY CHINESE TYPE OF BUILDINGS IN THE ANNAMESE CAPITAL

remained quite native, with its great sunny court in which the small tradespeople squat.

One would suppose that this old city had been abandoned to the ancient Dai-nam, in order that it might finish its dying here. Young Annam is growing up in the ports and industrial centers. It thrives at Saigon, where it finds movement, progress, money. But the legendary past, the ancestral memories and traditions, have taken refuge at Hué. If all the disembodied spirits of the great princes of old should seek a place in Annam where our civilization might not overtake them, they too would seek refuge in Hué.

How many years will this death-agony endure? The time required for the completion of the railway that is to connect the capital with Hanoi in the north and Saigon in the south; the time required to replace the pitiful little combination hotel and grocery, familiar to all colonials, with the palace for which plans are already drawn; the time required to build a few factories, offering employment to fishermen as laborers and princes as managers.

Yet life is placid here. For centuries untold, these Oriental sages have handed down the secret of quiet happiness, of living a muted existence.

Masked by bamboos, their houses are invisible from the road. Hereditary fear of pirates and greedy mandarins dictates that well-being should be concealed. Rich and poor have the same small garden-plots, the same earthenware jars with dwarfed trees, the same water-containers, collecting moisture in the sun. The principal room, on a level with the ground, is always furnished with the same large bed of bare wood, unadorned except for a porcelain pillow, round table, stools, and ancestral shrine—this last sometimes displaying nowadays a photograph instead of tablets, by way of progress.

In the houses of the poor you will find neither mother-of-pearl nor silks, and the edifying sayings are modestly inscribed on strips of red paper instead of inlaid in panels of *lim;* yet if there is only one bed, it is yours, and the single stool likewise is for you. Do not enter the houses of these timid people as masters. Smile, and they will smile back; play with the children, those quaint *nhos* whose heads are shaved except for a round black patch, by which the good spirits catch hold of them and pull them in the right way, and you will win the confidence of the parents. Only the dog will resent your presence with snarls and bared fangs; but at bedtime, when his masters

have retired to the kitchen in order to let you have the best place, he will become more friendly. Fearing bites as much as a human being, he will creep under your patched net, and later, possibly, his friend the black pig will join him.

You are likely to have a bad night of it, back bruised by the hard bed, body wringing with perspiration. There is no air under the thick netting; you turn from side to side without being able to drop off to sleep. A self-invited mosquito has slipped in somehow, and the torture begins. When you try to kill him, it sounds as if you were applauding; to no purpose you give yourself great self-mortifying smacks; invariably he escapes. Outside the gecko, a huge repulsive lizard, begins its grotesque serenade. *To-ké, to-ké.* It calls mechanically thus for hours, reminding one of a barytone with a cold, trying out his voice. *To-ké.* In spite of one's self one begins counting; an uneven number above seven brings luck. *To-ké.* Perhaps Thi-hai or Thi-ba in the kitchen is counting too, to know if he or she is loved. *To-ké, To-ké.* It is their way of plucking daisy-petals.

Time stands still, drags interminably, ravels thin. You think about the good nights in France, the fresh and caressing sheets, the blanket drawn up in the early morning. This enervating climate,

this air charged with humidity and fever, this electrical atmosphere that keeps the nerves tense —they are unendurable.

Am I going to sleep at last!

It is not sleep that is coming, but a sort of stupor, broken by sudden awakenings. And in the morning, you are more fatigued than when you went to bed, and spirit and body are unutterably weary. Yet the traveler, when he returns from this far-distant land and recounts his memories, will be sighing like all the rest, "Oh, the wonderful nights of Asia!" It is necessary to make the stay-at-homes jealous. Besides in perspective one becomes almost sincere: the body has forgotten; only the spirit remembers. The most worn-out colonial, speaking of his years of misery, finds enchanting words to dazzle the home-dwellers. Call him a liar if you choose, or, if you prefer, a poet who does not know how to rime.

In countless *cainhas* have I been offered cocoanut-milk, limpid as water with something of the taste of lemonade and orgeat. Rich and poor alike offer what they have. A little through curiosity, a little through fear, a little through vanity—also no doubt through a native sentiment of hospitality—the *nhaque* like the mandarin is delighted to receive a Frenchman. But you may be

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AN ANNAMITE MANDARIN AND HIS FAMILY AT HOME, SURROUNDED BY THE LUXURIES OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

introduced into Annamese homes and stay a long time and yet find it exceedingly difficult, even with a knowledge of the language, really to know or understand the people.

I remember the old bishop of Hué, who had been in Indo-China for a half-century, telling me one evening in his Annamese house at Phu-cam: "After a few months, I thought I knew all about them. At the end of twenty years, I realized that I knew nothing."

How can the stranger even distinguish the small from the great, in these houses that are all alike, where the old men in their oiled silk garments, surrounded by their descendants, live a sort of biblical existence, far removed from our world?

I remember being taken one morning to a large, low, thatched house, opening wide at one end on a lane of hibiscus. Not even a door, not even a façade; the single, vast room was nothing but an extension of the garden, sheltered by the roof of thatch. The furniture, consisting of a table and seats cut from rough wood, was half in the light of the court, half in the shadow of the house, and hens fed off the tiles under the table and the bed, without being aware where their domain really ended. Servants and humble neighbors came and went at their ease, mingling with the masters.

Was I in the home of some rich peasant, a village mandarin? Not in the least. I was with his Excellency Ton-that-han, one of the four pillars of the empire, former president of the council, commander of the Legion of Honor.

I met many of these old Annamites, rich and powerful, who have chosen at the end of their days the serene ancestral life. Every one thought them converts to European customs; then one day they disappeared and turned up again in some retired spot, reading old Taoist works, writing their memories with a brush, and breeding in their aquariums fantastic Chinese fish with transparent red and blue fins.

"Let me be buried in peasant's clothes," was the last request of one of them. "On top of my coffin put my embroidered mandarin robe, presented to me by the emperor. I am very proud of it, but I prefer to wear this peasant costume that really belongs to me, the dress of my childhood and the dress of my fathers."

I wonder if they believe that they actually die when they go to lie down in a chosen spot in a corner of the plain and their tablet is placed beside the ancestral tablets on the family altar. The sons who follow the funeral procession, with

hair untied and a hempen rope bound across their foreheads, give vent to lamentations and cries in front of the open grave, but this is merely custom. They know well that death removes only the form of the one they love. Death does not destroy; it transforms.

What a smiling lesson of eternity is presented by the two priests whose neighboring tombs stand amid pines and *filaos* on a hillside near Tu-duc's road! One of them, a sort of Buddhist cardinal, was called Khiet-ma, from his grade, and was head of Thuong-van Pagoda. The other, Hoa-thuong, was head of the Tu-kwang Pagoda. During their entire lifetime these two scholars discussed dogma, dedicating to each other edifying verses in which each sustained his thesis.

Renunciation, Khiet-ma asserted, consists in totally abstaining from all human action, even the practice of charity. Hoa-thuong, on the contrary, maintained that renunciation, as preached by Sakya-muni, is only relative; one can help the poor; it is good to assist the suffering.

Poem answered poem:

"If thou givest alms to a poor man, who will prevent him from buying a weapon to kill?" wrote Khiet-ma.

"If thou givest no alms to a poor man and he dies, it is thou who wilt have killed him," responded Hoa-thuong.

The discussion lasted twenty years. Then in 1915 Hoa-thuong died. Would his rival now be quiet, or would he search in other pagodas for another disputant? But no—the sage knew well that death is merely another threshold to cross. On the other side of the grave, he pursued the quarrel as if nothing fatal had ever interrupted it. He had his own future tomb constructed beside that of the dead priest, and on his stele he himself engraved the poems that he could no longer address to his friend except in eternity.

"Ah, well," he said, "you do not answer me any more. You admit that I was right."

Each month he found new arguments, which he traced on his stone. Then in 1919 Khiet-ma died in his turn, and this ended the dispute.

The two steles still defy each other on the red road that leads to the Court of Sacrifice. The simple peasants have already come to venerate them as two deities; occasionally a woman, passing, drops on them a flower or a fruit, or if she is very poor, only a pebble. And perhaps in the realm of shades the two unwearied spirits are still seeking the truth.

THE NEW EMPEROR OF ANNAM, WHO IS IN SCHOOL IN PARIS

What singular prestige is exercised by this menancholy old Hué, surcharged with memories! The more moving for being deserted are the vast courts of the palace; this of the Great Homage, with "swift lions" in gilded bronze and vases of blue porcelain; the one of the small audience hall, surrounding the sumptuous palace constructed by Gia-long; the Thi-mieu Court, where heavy dynastic urns rest on bronze tripods. This palace where ten kings have lived must possess a soul of its own, inhaled by the sovereign when he places the great five-clawed dragon on his head, exhaled only with his dying breath.

It amused me to believe this as I watched the sunset from the Cavalier du Roi. I thought of the young prince of Annam, a Frenchman with slant eyes and cheeks of old ivory, on the day when he will assume the jade scepter and pass through the golden door, opened only for the emperor. Clothed in ceremonial robes and glittering with gems, he will mount his ancestral throne to receive the homage of all the mandarins, prostrating themselves on the stone flags of the Court of Supreme Peace. What will he be thinking at that moment? What dizziness will trouble the young king, Parisian for many years, molded in our schools, the product of our salons, suddenly

plunged back into this old world whose customs, thoughts, even spirit, will be foreign to him. Will he regret our buoyant Occidental life, or will he perhaps insensibly turn into an Oriental prince, like his ancestors, under the influence of the old spirit of the palace? How is royalty born in the heart of a king?

Can one ever know? The heart of a man is an obscure well, and when that man is an Oriental, and when that Oriental is a king, it must remain forever a mystery to us. We must be satisfied, without the vain assumptions to which so many complacently give themselves, to draw conclusions from gestures, facts, appearances. Watching the expression of a face in itself will reveal much. The pretense of soul-searching has to be abandoned.

It is of the accession of Duy-tan that I am now thinking. History offers nothing more ridiculous and more pathetic. His father Thanh-thai reigned for more than twenty years. "A madman! A sadist!" certain colonials still exclaim at the mere mention of his name. "Not at all," protest others. "He was a clever sovereign, and we should have closed our eyes to his private life."

But his private life had become such that it was

extremely difficult not to intervene. Even the Annamite people held their sovereign in so little respect that they had ceased to greet him in Hué, and the street urchins followed him mockingly when he went to the river in an ordinary rickshaw and sat under a blue cloth, held at the four corners by his women.

So long as he was content to play market in one of the palace courts with his concubines, provided with their market-baskets, or to make an imitation of the governor's yacht out of gasolene-tins, no one said anything. He was allowed to give off-hand medical advice, to which his women were compelled to listen in his specially arranged doctor's office. During the exposition of Hanoi he ordered hundreds of corsets, bought all the French and other foreign decorations he was able to find in the shops, to ornament his gala costume, and sent an order to a concern for tram equipment, which he intended to have installed in the palace. Still every one commented respectfully on his performances. But his vagaries did not stop here.

One day, when he was playing market and he himself was holding a fish-basket, his first wife, the empress, took the liberty of saying to him:

"Your fish is not fresh."

Wounded in his commercial pride, the emperor gave his wife such a blow with his stick that he broke her arm. Another day medicine was not sufficient; he constituted himself a surgeon and, having bought anatomical charts and instruments, cut open the stomach of one of his concubines, who died as a result. The daughter of one of his ministers captured his fancy. He possessed himself of her and wounded her father with a pistol-shot. He struck and otherwise tortured his women, and was so cruel that many of them ran away from the palace and one threw herself into a well.

Finally in 1907 the scandal became so great that the French government decided to depose him. When Thanh-thai learned this, overcome with fear, he was convinced that he would be poisoned or hanged with a silken cord. His entourage reflected his apprehensions, and for a week the life of the forbidden court echoed with sobs and cries.

Eight days passed thus. Nobody had the faintest idea who was going to be the successor. Then came a telegram from Paris, instructing the governor-general to designate as emperor one of the sons of the deposed sovereign.

THE LATE EMPEROR OF ANNAM, KHAI DINH, BEING CARRIED IN HIS CORONATION PROCESSION AT HUÉ

Accordingly one morning at daybreak the governor and the resident, accompanied by the military doctor of the hospital, betook themselves to the palace to find out who was to be king—a strange errand for two republican officials! Gravely, as befitted their mission, they advanced into the women's apartments, where every one, women, children, and eunuchs, set up a deafening commotion. In the midst of the uproar, the officials and the major attempted to group the heirs, who were escaping, frightened to death. When they had succeeded in doing so, the governor, bowing to science, informed the major-doctor that it was his office to select the child most capable, in his judgment, of becoming king.

Without doubt, the colonial physician, who had done nothing up to that time but conduct physical examinations of sailors, must have been worried, but he quickly pulled himself together and, knitting his eyebrows in concentration, conscientiously began his inspection. To begin with, he discarded the oldest of the sons. "Look at that forehead, those ears sticking out, that furtive appearance! The boy is a degenerate who takes after his father. Well, speak! Say something to me!" This last addressed to the prince, in Annamese.

The prince succeeded only in mumbling a few words.

"Well, what did I tell you? You see for yourself that he is an idiot. Come along; the next!"

And the inspection continued. The heirs, however, reflecting the sins of the father, all were characterized by the same disagreeable face, puny limbs, and evasive manner.

Presently some one remembered little Duy-tan, the third son, born of a concubine. He was not to be found with his brothers. It developed that Thanh-thai, for some whim, had recently thrown him into prison and there placed him in irons with other children, the sons of his ministers. As the little prince saw the procession enter his prison, he began to cry, calling for his mother and stamping on the floor, but the major led him toward the light and examined him critically.

"*Ma foi,* this one seems to me to be all right!" he exclaimed, feeling him up and down as if he were choosing out of a litter of puppies the one not to drown. "His ears are too large, and his teeth are bad, but he is the best of the lot."

"You pass on him as satisfactory? Then let's have him."

Recognized as suited for the throne, the imperial urchin, still weeping, was dragged forth

from his prison: a child of eight, clinging insistently to the women, a ragged *nho,* pulled by the arm toward the royal apartments.

Now the transformation was to begin.

While the young prince was being properly dressed, the four ministers informed him of the great decision just made, explaining to him that he would become the ruler, the representative of Heaven, the emperor. When, that same morning, he was taken to the residency, he had ceased to cry and behaved in a dignified manner. On his return to the palace, he was closeted again with with his advisers and listened to their instructions. At three o'clock the ceremony of enthronement took place. A storm suddenly broke, with the tempestuous gustiness of the rainy season, and the procession, with its mandarins, its elephants, its musicians, and its parasols, advanced in floods of rain.

Duy-tan is on the throne, garbed in the sumptuous, imperial yellow robe. Haughtily he looks at the assembly, and when he pronounces his address his voice takes on the chanting and remote quality prescribed by the rites. Barely a hundred paces from the prison where a rather dirty little boy was stamping his foot this morning, the emperor speaks to his people. The transforma-

tion is accomplished. Another soul has passed into this small body.

At four o'clock he returns to the residency, carried in a chair and followed by all his court. He has such a manner, such a grave tone, that the governor and the resident look at each other in surprise, and the major-doctor bows respectfully before the sovereign he himself selected a few hours ago, out of the litter of imperial heirs, but whom now he scarcely recognizes.

These gray and pink walls hold fast many memories. It was from this high terrace that Duy-tan leaned and listened to the lesson of revolt, preached to him every day by a rebellious sorcerer, disguised as a fisherman. It was through this door that one evening in 1916 he fled to join the conspirators.

Will it ever be written, the astonishing chronicle of the Buffalo's Eye, by turn whimsical, mysterious, and cruel?

CHAPTER IX

THE CHINESE CITY OF CHOLON

HUÉ is beauty that is dead, the past, something that fades, silence on a tomb. Cholon, on the contrary, is life itself, active, aggressive, dazzling, a splendid confusion of light and sound.

Here it is futile to look for harmonious lines, beautiful relics, affecting scenery. There is nothing eternal to admire in Cholon, nothing marvelous except swarming life, no horizon—only smoke. And one grows dizzy with this never-ceasing tumult of labor by day and festivities by night; with these streets hung with banners and signs, smelling of ooze and of brine, of sandalwood and opium. Flaring restaurants that deafen and blind at the same time, radiate light, music, and noise. One feels lost in this city of the Middle Ages, masquerading with its World Fair products, dotted with little shops where a hundred candles are shining. From a pagoda one sets out to see singing-girls, tramps through the

great market spilling over into the adjoining streets, buys blue pots for ten cents and candied prunes impaled on sticks, climbs up to opium dens, slips into gambling-houses, rummages in the shops, and, when satiated with impressions and with noise, whistles for a Malabar carriage or a rickshaw and falls into it, exhausted. Returning by the Upper Road, half asleep, one is still pursued by a vision of the big bare stomachs of the dealers and of the painted cheeks of little "flowers."

Nothing in this world is like Cholon. The real Chinese of the North regard South China as an inferior country, a sort of colony. Cholon is still lower in the scale. It is the colony of South China, its refuge and outlet, a wide-open town where all the riffraff of Canton, Hainan, and Fuchow come to seek fortunes. Nobody can tell what the population is; a census is impossible among this dense crowd of beings without a civic status, living twenty to a room and hiding from the authorities, to escape taxes. Perhaps from two hundred to two hundred and fifty thousand, of whom twenty thousand live on the junks—all of them running their legs off, amassing money, having a good time!

A city of cries and cymbals, evil-smelling, roll-

ing in piasters, a crazy city, which never sleeps! At midnight the shops are still jammed with buyers, and in the open sheds of the "cutters of hair," Chinese, stretched out full-length, are being shaved under the breeze wafted by the punka. One can wander in and out of the theater till the morning train starts; the bell of the soup-vender answers the clack of the sugar-cane vender's hollow bamboo; the little singing-girls, fresh and neat as if they had just stepped out of bandboxes, go by in their rickshaws on their way to fill engagements; the shopkeepers display at their doors, like an advertisement, naked sagging paunches; the coolies lounge about; people come and go. The incessant click of wooden sandals on the pavement suggests that the street is playing castanets to keep itself awake. The canals are so crowded with junks and sampans, piled high with sacks of paddy and with great brown earthenware jars, cages of live chickens, pots of *nuoc-man* pickle, that one could cross from one side to the other without wetting the feet. Boats by day, houses by night. Here is another mysterious city on the dirty waters of the canals: a little light shining on what seems to be an altar, squatting men shoveling down their rice, children sleeping on mats, a girl with hair drawn smoothly back, braced on

scrawny legs at the prow of a sampan. Floating houses these are, warehouses, temples, gambling-dens, and worse.

One hundred steps away, in contrast to the black canals, is the blinding street—shadow and fire, silence and fireworks. Light streams everywhere, is reflected in mirrors, stuns one. From the gay restaurants of the Rue de Paris, an infernal music assails the ears. Screeching and braying of singing-girls, shrilling of flutes, sawing of violins, all confounded in a frightful charivari of piercing caterwauls and uproar, dominated by the barbaric thunder of big drums and the clash of cymbals.

In the street the coolies gather to listen. It is a concert to them, this racket. Squatting in rows all along the sidewalk, they contemplate, open-mouthed, the scornful singing-girls, the "flowers" with camellia-colored cheeks, who glance down at them from the high beflagged balconies. From time to time one of the coolies gets up, crosses the street, and enters a dark shop, from which, as soon as the door is opened, a strange odor of burned chocolate emanates. The sign reads, "Opium Merchant." People go in as if it were a tobacconist's.

Stretched side by side on hard benches, men

are smoking silently; one of them, on his needle, prepares the drug for a neighbor. Not a voice, not a sound, nothing! The thick smoke from the pipes adds to the darkness of this startling dormitory. Extended on his board, his arms stiff, almost naked, one smoker is dreaming—a skeleton in a state of ecstasy. His chest with its protruding ribs rises and falls, and in his shrunken waxen head his closed eyes look like two blue holes. Beside him another man is calmly reading a newspaper, with his neck resting on the hard pillow. Some go out blindly like automatons.

At the entrance a coolie is counting the coppers in his hand: has he enough? There are thousands who can no longer live without opium; all they earn goes to buy it. Those who have squandered everything, the poverty-stricken, the sick, the old, hang around the door like famished dogs, willing to do anything for a pipeful—only one pipeful! But the watchful owner is there behind the counter of black wood, obese, oily, smiling.

They all smile here—in the shops, the streets, the hospital, at home; showing you about the rice-mills; even pointing out the motor-hearse that bears away indiscriminately the venders, the rich men of the quays, the coolies. There is not a city

in the world where there is so much smiling. A fat Chinaman who listens uncomprehendingly and who smiles without saying anything: that is Cholon.

In every store, whether a grocery or a porcelain shop, a pharmacy or a glazier's, there is a prodigious pile of merchandise and ten clerks where we should have one; buyers with fat stomachs who wear no underclothes and no shoes; invariably a gross, good-natured fellow busily adding on his abacus, one bare arm rising above the heads of the crowd to adjust the balance-weight of the scales.

There is nothing familiar here. The front of every establishment presents its tall, vertical riddle of a sign-board, red or gilt, with mysterious characters that are more beautiful than pictures. In the interior, above the cluttered counters, are arches of gilded wood with interlacing branches, fishes, birds, a chimerical world of plants and beasts. You enter, look about, touch things. What is really being sold? It is impossible to say. Can those horrible, flattened-out, dry ducks with transparent edges, strung up like bats, conceivably be meant to eat? And these lacquered pigs, blown up like toys, and all these shriveled plants? The butcher's stall bleeds into the street,

and the big executioner chops off slices of one knows not what. One would like to ask questions, but how? Not a word of Annamese, not a word of French! Only if one speaks one of the five dialects of the South is one understood. And yet we are only ten minutes by motor from Saigon.

Here little boys are buying school note-books. China is modernizing its pictures; the illustrations are all of phonographs, telephones, street-cars. On all the furniture rest enormous pots, big-bellied, like the merchants. On all the walls are the three good fortunes—Prosperity, Long Life, Posterity. In the back rooms of the shops, perched on stools, patrons and clerks eat at the same table without ceremony, seizing with the point of their agile chop-sticks the pink shrimps or diced meat. A strange sort of diet: the soup is eaten, and the chicken is drunk!

In the rear of the little workshops naked men are busy with primitive tools, using methods of work a thousand years old. In the vat of a drying-establishment, a coolie, stepping forward and backward on an enormous, evenly balanced stone, turns the roller that presses the cloth; meanwhile his helper, with his cheeks puffed out, keeps the material damp by spraying forth the water he has taken into his mouth from a gourd.

Alongside are the motion-picture theater, electric street-cars, the dynamos of the rice-mills, the motor-hearse; for the Chinaman, dead, is in a greater hurry than when he is alive.

The contrast and lack of order are disconcerting. Here is the sacred rot of old China and the disarray of revolution. Should we be afraid or laugh? If one could but understand! Last year the Chinese school near the Great Pagoda suddenly declared itself atheistic. Without an exception the masters and the pupils refused to worship before the altar of Buddha. What was to be done? Nothing: we are in China! But the donations of the pagoda support the school, and these were promptly cut off. To obtain their rice, the atheists wisely resumed their religious services. Buddha, smiling, carried the day.

But is the pagoda itself so religious? Priests are not admitted any longer unless they are wanted for some special ceremony; the rest of the time the temple is given over to a ragged band of sacristans, humorous caretakers who do their cooking before the altar and act as guides to the worshipers.

An old worn-out woman enters, and receives, after paying a fee, a kind of wooden container filled with little numbered sticks. Making her

genuflections, she shakes the box rapidly until one of the sticks works up above the others and topples out. The attendant looks at its number and draws from a pigeonhole the corresponding horoscope. The old woman receives advice from heaven: "You are ill; you must grow stronger."

Would she be any better off at the Cantonese Hospital under the care of Chinese doctors or in the hands of that European charlatan who has grown rich by injecting 606, whether required or not, into all his patients, or installing them for twenty piasters in arm-chairs with nickel rests, where they receive electrical shocks while he explains that the curious sensation is due to the departure of the disease!

The French doctors who give their services to the colony are obliged to play a comedy to be received. They must take the pulse on both wrists, since the Annamites and Chinese have always had it done this way. Above all, they must order potions, even if the patient needs only external applications; for in the Chinese conception it is only what you drink that cures.

With us, science has realized all forms of progress, medicine has discovered new methods; but Old China will have none of them and takes care of itself as it has for the last five hundred years.

I often used to visit the Cantonese Hospital in the morning, when consultations were going on in a kind of sheltered courtyard before a rock basin surrounded by dwarfed trees. My confrères of the oblique eyes took me, heaven knows why, for a medical inspector, and sometimes asked my advice by a look, since none of them spoke French. I answered by shaking my head, and they were satisfied. The patient sat at a table, his hands placed on two small cushions, and the doctor, sitting opposite, simultaneously took the pulse on both wrists. That was enough. Just by comparing the two pulses, he knew the disease. No ausculations or examinations; only the eyes, the tongue, the pulse. Then dipping his brush in the ink, he wrote, or rather drew, a prescription, always for an infusion of herbs or powdered bone. For an old woman whose eye is filmed he prescribes, as for the others, a decoction of roots, but she is to drink half of it and wash her eyes with the rest.

Spectacles on nose, stomach being aired as usual, the pharmacist officiates at the back of the room, surrounded by his receptacles. Nobody has ever been able to tell me all they contain; the French interpreter did not know enough Chinese, and the Chinese interpreter did not know enough

French. There are leaves, roots, and bones for weak people, swallows' nests for consumptives; the enormous jaw-bones of a tiger, hanging in a corner, no doubt for an important patient. Those who have no disease recover; the others, also, occasionally. And perhaps among these sufferers, groaning on their mats, is a Chinese who uses a telephone and a typewriter in his office. The one condition easily adapts itself to the other.

Everything is discordant, and nothing explains itself. These people are at the same time astute and credulous. Their life expresses itself in servitude and anarchy. The knitted undershirts they all wear reduce them to equality.

In the theater, in the middle of the play, property-men in soiled pajamas appear on the stage and carry tea to the screeching heroine, who drinks it in one gulp out of the tea-pot and goes on with her song a note higher. Meanwhile the attendants stop to arrange the hair of a minor character or squat in a corner to chat with the musicians, who play or stop, according to their fancy, as indifferently as if they were sawing wood. No one is surprised. There is not an artist or a scholar in the crowd, eating sweets, roasted chestnuts and pop-corn, while it watches

the dancers from the spectators' benches. The Pekingese could make himself understood here no better than the European; none of these expatriated men speaks the Mandarin dialect. What use would it be to him? The richest man in Cholon, with an income of nine or ten million piasters, began as a rag-picker; another, pulling rickshaws.

Besides, rich or poor, they are all alike, all coolies. None is better dressed than another. All have bare stomachs or white undershirts and short trousers that leave the calves bare. The clients in the tea-houses are so like the servants that one does not know whom to tip. At the wheel of an expensive motor-car, one sees a big man with shaved head and no more on his back than the laborers of his rice-mill.

I remember going one evening after the Annamese New Year to the Cantonese Pagoda, transformed into a feast-hall for the banquet of the stockholders. Tables were set up in the court, in the temple, even before the altar; the Chinese is always at ease in the presence of his gods. The kitchen was blazing, and almost naked boys were rushing about with platters, carrying doll-dishes with diminutive bits of meat, four tiny salad-leaves and spices. Passers-by came stray-

ing in, took a turn round the tables with their yelling children, and went out again, and nobody asked them a question. In a side room a dozen men were eating by themselves. The same menu, the same stools, the same undershirts and bare legs. I could not discover whether they were the founders of the pagoda, dining at a separate table, or the servants, dining in the pantry.

Cholon is wealth in undress, luxury in old shoes. You find plenty of prodigal Chinese there but none who makes an ostentatious display. You can visit the richest and never see a handsome piece of furniture or a rare curio. Still there was one who perpetrated this rare piece of folly: for his drawing-room he bought in a modern shop of the Rue Catinat two wax figures he had admired in the window—a gentleman in a business suit and a lady in a spangled dress—and placed them in the middle of his room. All Cholon came to see. There is no hierarchy among the inhabitants. Two castes suffice: rich and poor, fat and thin.

What do the poor think of the rich? As everywhere, they envy them. What do the rich think of the poor? They despise them, as they do elsewhere. In the eyes of the plutocrat with his ten millions, made by smuggling, usury, prostitution,

traffic in licenses for the exportation of rice and building-quarters for coolies, the poor are not even cattle; they are grain for the crusher. This contempt of the great for the small is so absolute, so placid, so smiling, that one cannot believe in its cruelty. One might almost end by laughing at it.

In 1923 the Chamber of Commerce of Cholon, which is immensely rich, constructed a superb building with Corinthian columns, stucco ornaments, and staircases of white stone, all as un-Chinese as can be imagined. But in spite of the money lavished, the work dragged and the installation was not complete till the day of the inauguration.

All was ready for the evening celebration. The invitations had been out for some time, and it was not possible to postpone the affair. But the French resident-mayor and the representative of the public works, after inspecting the structure, came to the conclusion that the reinforced concrete supports of the ceilings were too weak to hold up a great crowd and withheld their consent to the opening until a test of strength had been made by piling up on the first floor a weight of fifty thousand kilos, in the form of bags full of earth. To accomplish this in the short time allowed was out

of the question. It was not possible in half a day to fill a thousand bags of earth and carry them up. The Chinese, however, showed no perturbation. They whispered among themselves with discreet smiles and nods, and shortly the president said to our troubled officials:

"Let us manage. We guarantee you the same weight."

Immediately one thousand coolies were gathered together from the workshops and the docks, and, under the pretext of making an address to them, they were crowded upon the upper floor. One thousand bags of earth must be found and carried, but a thousand coolies . . .

Grouped in the garden, the Asiatic experts watched with amused curiosity, laughing behind their hands with the pointed finger-nails and making bets. The supports stood the test.

"You see, everything is quite firm," they congratulated themselves, as their crowd came down.

And the thousand bags having gone their way, refreshments were prepared.

"All the same," said the mayor, feeling anxious after the event, "suppose the ceiling had fallen."

The narrow eyes of the Chinese delegate contracted a little more. "We had provided five hundred thousand piasters, *M. le Résident.*"

Apart from the swarming human beings, everything has its price in Cholon and is bought or sold. Even the mud. Since they are obliged to live on mud-flats, they have become venders of mud —two piasters the cubic meter—for filling in! They sell anything; they would sell the water of the canals if they found buyers; they would sell the air. In Cochin-China you never hear people say, "I am going to the grocer's." They say, "I am going to the Chinaman's." The Chinese and commerce are the same thing. Whatever can be bought, they have; and whoever owns nothing himself, sells chances. He opens a gambling-house. With a game of cards for the bank, bits of paper for the thirty-six animals, a bowl and a few coins for the *ba-quam,* a man can become rich; it has been done.

They arrive, thin and miserable, and leave, fat and comfortable. As the rich return, other miserable ones take their place at the bottom of the ladder—clerks with shrewdness, coolies with arms and legs—awaiting their lucky hour. And if fortune does not favor them, they will have, like thousands of others, the acrid intoxication that offers consolation on the hard benches of the ten-cent opium-dens.

In former times all this starving population

would have overrun the Annamese rice-lands under the Han banners, but for many hundreds of years the Chinese have appreciated the folly of bloody conquests. Broadswords, lances, crudely painted masks or guns, cannons, hand-grenades —what nonsense! You do not conquer nowadays; you exploit. A red umbrella under your arm, all your worldly goods tied up in a bundle, not twenty cents in your pocket—there is your modern invader! The Chinese have been installed at Cholon for the last hundred and fifty years; they have spread over all lower Cochin-China, digging canals instead of building forts, and neither the edicts of emperors nor the measures of French governors have been able to check their pacific conquest. Soldiers can be beaten off, not merchants. The Annamites, who exploit so mercilessly their neighbors, the Mois, Cambodians, Muongs, and Laotians, are in their turn exploited by the Chinese.

The Chinese has no equal in business. He is so clever he does not have to be crooked. And one has to admit he is honest: no signature is necessary, his mere word suffices. From the beginning of time, his forebears have trafficked, counted, and sold; it is a vocation passed on for centuries by the sharp little dealers of the southern ports.

The versatile Annamite, so easily turned aside from his objective, has been unable to defend himself against these smilingly persevering invaders. Little by little the former master let himself be dispossessed, fell into debt, was invariably caught in the panics caused by a slump. Finally all the rice-trade passed into the hands of the conquerers with the red umbrellas. The country belongs to France, the rice-fields belong to the Annamites; but the rice belongs to the Chinese.

What this horde of avid expatriated men wanted was a city in their own image. They found it: Cholon, Cholon built on mud-flats, Cholon overflowing with money and with misery. The loose earth gives way on every side, sinks under the buildings, oozes away from the foundations. Building goes on anyway. There are thirty yards of liquid mud in the canal that cannot be dredged for fear the unstable shores will give way and drag down the factories along the banks. What does it matter? A single yard of this evil-smelling ground is worth two thousand francs.

No city is so incredibly rich. Money is sown broadcast, thrown away in the hope of seeing it multiply. Everywhere and on every occasion you find intrigue, trafficking, gambling. The contractor wants to circumvent the inspector of the

department of public works, the owner of public houses wants to buy up the police captain, and the bootlegger lavishes favors on the custom-house agent. During the World War licenses for the exportation of rice were sold at auction. When the question of permits for the slaughter-house came up, a stream of gold poured into the pockets of intermediaries, who gave out that they knew how to pull wires. One fat Chinese lamented that he had spent twenty thousand piasters for nothing. For these people cannot understand why the graft that is the rule among themselves is not practised by us.

Money? It is spent as it comes, with a lavish hand. In the clubs and the gambling-houses fortunes change hands, sometimes thirty or forty thousand piasters at a time—nearly half a million thrown on the tables by these gamblers in knitted undershirts! During the Têt festival, they burned two hundred thousand piasters' worth of fire-crackers; two millions of francs gone up in noise and smoke.

But one can afford to spend when money pours in. Certain shops, where unclad merchants wait on you in a leisurely way, every year have a turnover of a million piasters. The railway that connects Cholon with Saigon, that same vermin-

infected railway which is regarded as a joke by transient Frenchmen off the steamers, brings in more for its length than any other line in the world: a hundred and twenty thousand piasters a year, for a six-kilometer road.

In China there would be a general or a provincial governor to claim his share of the profits on behalf of the state or simply for himself, but the treasury of Indo-China is not so grasping. It is indolently satisfied with what the sale of opium and alcohol brings in and does not look for more. It seems to connive at the enrichment of all these Chinese. And these, when they have made enough, return to Canton or Fuchow to spend our piasters, unless they are afraid of revolutions and prefer, as to-day, to end their lives in Indo-China, where France constitutes herself the benevolent guardian of their hoards.

Unconsciously I have wandered a long way from the opium-houses, the dark canals where the sampan-women wait, the noisy restaurants in which pretty girls with painted cheeks sing at the tops of their voices as they flutter their fans. All of a sudden, money!

It is impossible to approach any subject without having money forcing itself upon the attention, like an unpleasant advertisement. A forest

is a possible investment, a naked Moi a taxable object, a junk, putting in, something on which to collect a port fee. Since money runs the world, one is endlessly obliged to speak of it, in spite of one's self.

The canals on which boats ply, the melancholy rubber-trees with slashed trunks, the red earth of the plateaus, the blinding mounds of the salt-mines, all lead up to the window of a bank. When will the desert be divided into lots, the tide of the ocean be turned into shares?

But money has to be considered in this swarming market, living for nothing else. From the plain of the tombs to the Chinese Canal, everything is business, everything is piasters.

Often European tourists, visiting Saigon for the first time, are arrested by the pretty houses along the waterfront at Cholon. In the evening they suggest a red-light district, with their enormous lanterns, their too brightly lighted rooms displaying brilliant colors seen through carved doors. Strangers are sure they smell opium, and they think of forbidden joys.

May one enter? Do not attempt it; these are business offices!

Inside, fat suave Chinese and dried-up ancients interminably discuss deals in thousands of tons

of rice. No matter how difficult it is to come to an agreement, they never lose their good nature or cease to exchange compliments as they drink their unsweetened tea. They use the telephone. They have bank-accounts. And they have nothing whatever in common with those fantastic Chinese of the musical comedies who dance about with their fingers pointing in the air and dress in long embroidered robes and have bells on their peaked hats. In all Cholon you will not see a man with a pigtail. Only a single reactionary has kept his, and all who see him make fun of him and look upon him as the Parisians look upon a Norman peasant, wearing his red-striped cotton cap. It was Sun Yat-sen, hiding in Cholon when the police were searching for him in 1908, who brought the new point of view to these expatriated Chinese. Since he condemned queues, the queues were all immediately cut off. Revolution, like the army, is opposed to hair.

But with heads shaved or with pigtails, they remain essentially Chinese. When business is over for the day and the last quotations have been received and the last cable has been sent, they leave the West and return to their own manners and customs, concealing their family happiness from the eyes of Europeans or playing mah-jongg

at the club, where the singing-girls contribute their futile conversation and their painted cheeks.

The singing-girls are the charm of Cholon nights, "flowers" that pass in rickshaws at nightfall, elaborately costumed and wearing their hair always with the same black fringe on the forehead, preserving a fixed, mask-like expression, as if a smile would disturb the orderliness of their appearance. They are like dolls being taken out —all alike, as if provided by the same merchant; robes of light-colored silk, complicated coiffures or heavy braids hanging down, curiously slim legs in colored stockings, tiny feet shod with satin mules. And all in the fashion of short clothes, like Paris—the black satin trousers come only just below the knee! From seven o'clock on, they are like a burst of color in the wretched hubbub of the city now beginning to light up. Fascinated, one gazes after them. There is something too new, too highly colored, too artificial about them. A luxury of poverty! And yet artificial as they are, they are charming. They pass —pink, white, blue, serene and dignified—and when, jumping down from their rickshaws, they vanish within some house, the street suddenly has lost something.

Prostitutes? Not at all! Not all of them, at

any rate, and very rarely for the benefit of a European. It is said that their wax-like little nostrils detect in us an extremely unpleasant odor. In any case why should they compromise themselves with white men, for no particular pleasure, when Chinese will pay twice as much, simply to have them around while they rattle their dominos, or to hear them sing some old screeching tune to the accompaniment of a moon-violin?

One of them is singing herself hoarse in the alcove where we are dining. Her neck is stretched out, the muscles of her cheeks are taut, and her shrill voice dominates the instruments. The guitar-player redoubles his efforts, with monkey-like contortions. Another of the musicians, overcome with opium, is falling asleep over his violin. With a clash of cymbals and the thunder of a big drum the verse comes to an end. And without a pause, in the same piercing voice, the second singing-girl begins:

"In secret I sigh. Who knows my sorrow?

"Since we have been separated, not one letter has come from you.

"If I die of grief to-day, it will be on your account, my dear lord. . . ."

They sing at the top of their voices, with ob-

vious strain, but without any real animation in their passive faces.

"You have taught your slave, during long nights, to yield her soul up to mad dreams.

"Alas! Since I have so much sorrow, it must be because in a previous existence I lived an unworthy life. For that reason am I now despised.

"It is the fate of fair maidens with painted faces to be abandoned! Who knows how long this bitterness will endure?

"Never more can I escape from one word—sorrow."

Nobody listens, except myself and the interpreter who is translating for me. The rest eat gluttonously, with contented expressions; always a smile, when you look at them. Meanwhile the courses, served in blue porcelain bowls, follow one another in unending procession: sharks' fins, fish-bladders stuffed with pigeon, crabs and asparagus, mushrooms and chicken soup. And the disguise is so complete that one never knows whether one is being served with chicken or fish. Everything is sticky and flavorless.

Over the partitions of other private dining-rooms more music and more shrill voices penetrate to us, making one great, deafening concert,

punctuated by the clash of cymbals, streaming out into the street through twenty open windows.

The flute pursues its piercing melody, and one little singer, slighter than the others and still with the young girl's red twist round her braid, makes the drumsticks dance on the earthenware tambourine. A big jovial Chinaman stares at her and takes her by the arm when she has stopped playing. Will the *k'ouai p'o* (she is their patroness) untie for him this evening the symbolic red ribbon? It is a high-priced emblem.

My interpreter, whose sharp eyes never leave me, has caught my look and read my thought.

"These are young girls, you know, sir, and we treat them well."

It is undesirable that Europeans should catch them in anything wrong. To distract my attention as I continue to watch the obese seducer and the little girl with painted cheeks, so thin in her loose coat and her wide black trousers, my interpreter overwhelms me with solicitous attentions, calls another singer, tries to teach me how to use chop-sticks.

"Like this, and then you dip into the soy-sauce. It is very good, sir."

The new singer remains standing nonchalantly between us, like an automaton. One cannot dis-

tinguish any of these girls except by the color of their coats. They appear ugly, and yet there is singular grace in their faces, whether cruel or gentle, with their strange oblique eyes drawn out as if pulled by a string.

"Old women buy them very young and bring them up to be singing-girls. But they are not all of this kind. Some girls rent their services to the *k'ouai p'o* and bring her in as much as two hundred piasters a month; or several join forces and live together. Very simply, you know, sir, five or six in the same room, no better than coolies."

"Land of flowers and perfume" is the name for the demi-monde out here. And the procurer, who exists here too, is euphemistically called "emperor of the flowers," *fa wong*. He is precisely that old scarecrow seen slinking in the passages, looking for business. How deceptive words are!

The prettiest girl, called to another room, goes out with her snake-skin violin. She knows all the songs and all the old lays in which the "lovely maidens with polished finger-nails" lament their love.

"Her embroidered bag is an inexhaustible reservoir of olden-time songs." Eyebrows arched like an accent above her narrow eyes, mouth

stretched wide, she sings indefatigably throughout the evening, fluttering her fan on her knees for effect. Lao-tsing, she is called, Pure Willow. In the ears of a Frenchman the name is charming, but a Chinese is concerned only with the sound; the words themselves have ceased to signify anything in particular. (Why am I learning so many things? Must I lose all the illusions I brought from France, forget all that I believed to be the mysterious grace of Asia? Vinci, I think, was wrong; to understand, to know, frequently means that you love less.)

I hear Lao-tsing holding forth on the adjoining balcony. Her voice is less shrill than the others; it sounds rather as if she were mewing. And my Chinese murmurs the song, quite familiar to him:

"If you linger too long in the dusty past, hoarfrost will whiten your temples.

"At the bridge-head the autumn willows have shed half their leaves.

"Do not enter on the ancient bridge of lost souls."

Drum and cymbals and wails accompany these melancholy sentiments.

In the middle of this din, the repast stretches on interminably. One seems to be eating noise.

I keep drinking glasses of *chum-chum* after every course, to get rid of the sickening taste of all those pastes. Only the very last dish is eatable, fried rice with crabs and ham, but this is precisely what you must not touch if you have any manners. Your host offers it as if to say, "If you are still hungry!" But etiquette demands that you refuse, even though you may be starving. Personally I have not always followed the rules of etiquette.

My Chinese friends grow more lively. New singing-girls arrive as others depart, after marking down the number of times they sang with as many pencil-strokes on a sheet of paper presented by the patron. At the foot of the stairs they have only to pass through a single door to find themselves, without going out into the street, in a neighboring shop where thousands of baubles, jewelry, cosmetics, ribbons, are for sale. All the piasters they earn up-stairs they spend below. These Cantonese think of everything.

From time to time, one of the diners, European or Chinese, goes off to lie down on a broad bed of teakwood and smoke a few pipes—just a long blue puff. Then he comes back, as he might do between two cigarettes, and champagne is served.

"Why should we be forbidden to smoke opium?" asks my interpreter. "Does Europe deprive itself of alcohol?"

"No, but the United States condemns both," some one replies.

My Chinese smiles. "America, youthful America!" he mocks gently. "'Neither art nor vices! They will not be civilized for some time yet, sir."

And he goes to lie down in his turn, his head on the majolica pillow, the tiny bowl of the long ivory pipe held above the flame. Deftly a "flower" turns the drug on the point of her needle. The brown ball shrinks, and the chest of the smoker lifts to inhale, as if on reaching the top of a cliff, in one long breath, he were drinking in the pure air.

This smell, this rice-wine, this champagne, have gone to my head, and I lean against the balcony in the hope of getting some air. Everywhere the same stifling heat, the same humidity that makes your clothes cling to you. It was better under the fan. On the opposite balcony a whole orchestra has been let loose, and the crouching coolies on the sidewalk never tire of listening. A colonial official, catching sight of me, comes over to join me.

"I need your advice," I remarked. "I have in there a very useful Chinese. He stays by me from morning to night, and he is showing me everything in Cholon. How shall I compensate him?"

The old colonial winked. "Don't put yourself to the trouble," he replied. "He is already paid."

I looked at him in surprise.

"In the usual way," he went on. "Wherever he takes you, to the factories and the gambling-houses, the rice-dealers and the singing-girls, he gets something. He tells all those people that he has been chosen to guide visitors of mark about Cholon and that obviously he has influence, and since they all have more or less need to stand in well with the administration, he extracts money on these pretenses. Here, we are in China; everything can be converted into money!

"When I was a young resident, just installed in my new position, a Chinese, a grocer, you understand, left a group of Annamites lined up for inspection and came toward me with a face radiating joy and hand extended. I did not stop to think and shook his hand. Well, that fellow derived an income for a year from that hand-shake; he got all the people in my territory to provide

for him! And now, you understand, I have grown suspicious."

We remain standing side by side, looking down on the animated street. The murmur of happy voices flows along, mingled with the cries of itinerant merchants. Rickshaws glide silently in the midst of the patter of bare feet. A woman, seated on the sidewalk, is busily hunting lice in her brat's head; extracting them from its mop every few seconds, she cracks them between her teeth.

"All this interests you, does it not?" the colonial remarks. "Then do not stay too long. After fifteen years, you know, like me . . ." He draws himself together, stretches and utters a profound sigh. "Paris!" he murmurs. "That is still our finest colony."

Nothing is stranger or more disturbing than those nights of Cholon. The long walks beside the black canals, those plague-distributing canals which once turned Cholon into a horrible Venice, but which are now gradually being filled in and replaced with commonplace avenues. Occasionally I climb down into a junk, where a game of *ba-quam* goes on all night under the yellow light of a ponderous lamp. Surrounded by absorbed players, the owner, with the end of a stick, keeps

pushing aside those coins, four at a time, which pass beyond the rim of the depression. The number remaining, from one to four, will be the winner. Over his shoulder a rickshaw-coolie, whose thin back is still dripping from his last run, counts feverishly. "Four, four!" No, he has lost! He climbs up the bank, picks up his rickshaw again, and goes off.

Everywhere they gamble, in restaurants, houses, junks, pagodas. They even wanted to fit up a ship to play at sea. The resident, if he hears that his *bep* is having a gambling-party in the kitchen, need not be surprised. They must play, it makes no difference where or how—robbed by the proprietors, hunted by the police. Gambling is the great vice, or amusement, of Asia; and Cholon, at night, is nothing but a huge gambling-den.

"You will find the highest stakes being played at my place. And I have no fear. The police are not going to get either my cash-box or my skin."

The man who said this to me has grown rich off the Annamese roulette and *ba-quam*. He is an incredible adventurer whom the police have been trying to nail for the last ten years. By a curious circumstance every time they raid his

house, posting guards at all the doors and breaking in, revolvers in hand, they catch only a few coolies and find nothing to seize but the ten piasters of the keeper's fee. Gambler's luck perhaps.

A real filibustering hero, daring, cynical, with a kind of pirate's head on the shoulders of a wrestler. Chinese on his mother's side, mulatto on his father's, French in the eyes of the law! Life here is certainly stranger than fiction. The man's house moreover is as incredible as the master. He gathers together his big Cantonese gamblers in a room tricked out only as one would expect to see it in a motion-picture film. It is impossible to tell where any of the doors are; complicated passages, hidden stairways, secret recesses—nothing is lacking. Above, in a vast studio, there are divans, pipes, boxes of "the drug," a lighted lamp. Smoke who will! Since opium is costly, friends come.

"It is my way of doing good," the half-caste says jokingly. "You do not smoke? You make a mistake."

He rations himself, he tells me: fifty pipes a day. But all smokers are alike. At the thirtieth pipe, they get up in a stupor and tell you, with

no idea of deceit, "I have smoked fifteen; it is a little too many."

While preparing himself one—this is to be the last—he discusses the future of the colony, apparently with perfect seriousness. "If money is needed, they should farm out the gambling-interests. I myself would take the Saigon-Cholon area and pay two and a half million piasters a year. Think of the return, at twelve francs ten, as the rate is to-day!" Then, bursting into a laugh, he adds: "But I should have to turn police myself, in that case. No quarter to unlicensed gambling-dens!"

It is late. At last the lights are extinguished in the houses. The singing-girls, looking tired and rumpled, return home. Some few will see the night out in the Chinese inns, where their strident voices, the shrill flute, the squeaking violin, are still audible. "Castanets and a lute are the fate of beautiful girls."

"They are perfectly all right, you know, sir," explains my indefatigable Cantonese. "The authorities supply each one with a card, which costs eighty piasters."

How I should have liked to see the police-register in which Happiness, Gold of the Willow,

and Tea Blossom wrote down their names! So it is here that the tale of our romantic loves comes to an end!

Little sellers of unmusical sounds, whom I thought so ugly on the first evenings, with your flat faces, your oiled tresses, and your chests tightly compressed under your jackets, little "flowers," chatterboxes, laughing and mocking, eager for gain and so devoid of sensuality that your masters must have recourse to strange practices to succeed in moving you— I remember well the place where you received me, dressed in pajamas, as the little flirts of the Place Pigalle might have done, and where we ate fish with condiments, shrimp croquettes, and eggs. Cheeks less tinged with yellow, a bed instead of a mat, a calendar in place of the bearded image of the god of war, and sausage instead of fried viands dipped in soy-sauce, and we might as well have been in the Rue Lepic, in Paris.

Everything fascinated me, the cocoanuts cut in halves serving as boxes, the altar of the lesser deities. And poverty was so apparent, in spite of the tiled floor and the strips of red paper on which moral sayings or good wishes were inscribed. My Cantonese translated one of them:

"We ask the gods to further the prosperity of our business."

Oh, little singers!

But all this is nothing compared with Cholon in the week of the Têt festival, when the dragon of cloth and cardboard is abroad in the streets, opening its enormous jaws, lashing its long red tail in which twenty coolies are hidden. A laughing throng; frightened fleeing youngsters; calls bandied from the windows. To get at the piasters pinned to leaves, the dragon dances, leaps about, climbs up on the backs of the coolies who form a pyramid, while fire-crackers explode all around under the legs of the gaping crowd.

Day and night, the bombardment goes on. Along the restaurant balconies, strings of explosives are prepared, and at ten o'clock, the dinner-hour, they all go off simultaneously, thus notifying the guests and creating throughout the feverish city an impression of a sudden tumultuous offensive. In the narrow streets, on the docks, everywhere, fire-crackers pop like grenades. Those who can afford them buy big bamboos, rammed with gunpowder, which shake the houses when they explode. The ancestral spirits are about

to descend from heaven, and it is necessary to frighten away the *makouis* and to drive off the bad devils who wish to block the way. Fire-crackers amounting to thousands of piasters are set off uninterruptedly.

The streets overflow with people. The dense crowd cannot budge—a pair of chop-sticks would remain upright if placed on the ground. Everything is red: the strips of paper on which the public scribe traces good wishes, the panels of silk with embroidered Chinese ideographs, the piles of watermelons cut open for display. Red is the color of happiness.

At the market there is a fearful crush. Selling goes on all night; for on New Year's day itself not a shop is open. Since the market is quite inadequate to the demand, the baskets spill all over everywhere; fruits and vegetables are piled up in the streets.

The kitchen god has mounted to heaven to render an annual account of the behavior of the house-dwellers. While he is gone, the houses are decorated. Images and votive papers are pasted on the walls, and curious budding branches are purchased; these, as soon as they are sprinkled with warm water, blossom forth with yellow and red flowers. Objects for pious worship are also

laid in—imitation gold bars, imitation piasters, imitation paper money. The shrewd Chinese even fools his gods.

At last, utterly exhausted, one finds it impossible to endure more and comes to a dazed halt. It is necessary to concentrate, so that the eye can make a selection from among all this jumble of images. But even in memory, disorder persists; bare paunches, rickshaw-men, singing-girls, soup-venders, betufted children, all mingle and become confused in a hopeless medley. Day and the smoke of the rice-mills; night and festive illumination. That is Cholon!

Once more I see, in the Rue des Marins, the dragon dancing in front of the panting locomotive, to the accompaniment of the cries of the multitude—as if ancient China amused itself, mocking progress.

CHAPTER X

UNDER THE SIGN OF THE PIASTER

"*ALLEZ, hop!*" My companion leaped lightly from his carriage and scaled the wooden stair of his bungalow in three strides. He had covered acres of plantation; he had stopped for a moment to inspect the labor of a clearing-squad, burning a corner of brush in which the bamboos were popping like musketry; he had run in to see one of his section chiefs, a young Frenchman shivering with fever; he had made a halt at the factory, where he had examined the vats and had passed through the drying-sheds. He had been out since early dawn and was returning only at high noon, when an irresistible languor stretches the coolies out like dead men, under the thatched roofs of their shelters.

At the sound of wheels, a boy had dashed to the phonograph and set it going. We entered the house, greeted by jazz. My young host looked at me and laughed.

"Are you surprised? I have trained one of my Annamites; the instant I come back, the orchestra must strike up. I take my brandy and soda to music. I have tiffin to music; I sip my coffee to music. Then half an hour of siesta, and off to work again. In this way, I have no time for reflection, you see."

I saw, and I admired. He was a tall chap, substantial in both body and soul, the traditional planter of travel-tales—tanned face, white helmet, shirt-sleeves rolled up on sinewy arms, calves bare under shorts, heavy boots, a horn-handled knife at his belt.

On a concession of twenty-five thousand acres, he is in sole charge. He is the only person to give orders and assume responsibility. Thirty-two hundred coolies, seven hundred thousand rubber-trees, a factory, transportation of the rubber—all this he has to run, keep up, develop, attend to, entirely alone, without being able even to consult any one, whatever emergency may arise. The directors and shareholders of the enterprise care only for dividends. Do they even so much as know where their plantations are? "Somewhere over there in Cochin-China!"

Coolies desert, storms wash out the road, overseers take to their beds, the rubber-trees die, those

that have been tapped too young turn sickly. Paris cables to ask why production is lower than last month. There is nothing for it but to work harder than ever. The gangs are pushed. "Every coolie must handle five hundred trees a day!" The number of vats is increased, a new drying-shed is constructed, a watchful eye is kept on the storehouses where the grainy sheets of crude rubber are stacked. At the end of the day, the manager goes home, utterly done up.

This is the bad hour. On the table in a little ivory frame is the photograph of a woman and child; they had to be left behind in France. It is good to look at them; strength comes back. But it is not wise to look too long—a mere glance—for depression sets in quickly. So in order that the master need not think, Nam selects a record at random and winds the crank. Such is the nightly festival. The exile, hands thrust deep into his pockets, strides up and down the veranda, whistling off his blues.

"No time for reflection, you see."

One requires a rugged constitution to live that kind of life, but something else is necessary; more important is the other sort of health—health of spirit. The section heads and assistants may fall sick and lose courage; the manager is not per-

mitted to do so. Who would take his place? He is not only the head but the motive power. His energy makes the whole machine run. His will, his faith, his joy in his work, brace all the others.

"Little So-and-so is down, is he? All right. I'll go to see him at once."

At the other end of the plantation, in his wooden house, is a twenty-five-year-old colonial, delirious, hollow-eyed, jaundiced, and wringing with perspiration even under his fan. Or perhaps he is not even sick, but ennui has taken hold of him, misery at being so far away, so solitary, losing his youth out here, cut off from every one he loves. Quinine is no remedy for this type of fever.

"So things are bad, are they? Come along, old chap. Buck up! Look here; I've an idea! I'm going to take you home to luncheon."

The manager talks to him, discusses prospects, hums snatches of the airs the phonograph grinds off, and opens a bottle of champagne.

"Clink! Here's to your next leave of absence, hey?"

His junior is visibly cheered and returns to his post in that vast melancholy wood, where thousands of trees stand in straight lines, and every tree holds out its latex-cup, like a mendicant.

It is always hard in the beginning. Later on

you get used to it. Perhaps the ties with the past weaken. Other roots are put out that hold you to the land of your choice. A whole new life opens. Evenings will come, to be sure, when, lost among these red lands in which the brick-colored dust clings thickly to the boots, you will experience again the old feeling of isolation, but less sharply than before. You take your rifle and go hunting. There are plenty of deer and tigers. Or else you go off and forget your troubles for two days at Saigon, dancing at the Continental, visiting the Chinese restaurants at Cholon, the theater if a play is being given. Then back to your station and into harness again, face to face with the daily struggle and the ever-unattained goal!

It is due to a hundred lives of this sort, a hundred young Frenchmen not all of whom have been destined to return, that the rubber miracle has been realized in Cochin-China. Less than forty years ago there was not one specimen of the *Hewea* rubber-tree growing in the colony. The Botanical Gardens at Saigon had barely succeeded in keeping alive a few saplings as a curiosity, and people laughed at a certain planter who had found amusement in setting out some spindly *Ficus elastica* along the Bien-hoa road. To-day one

THE SUBSIDIZED MUNICIPAL THEATER IN SAIGON IN WHICH FRENCH ACTORS PERFORM IN FRENCH PLAYS

can count rubber-trees by the millions on the immense Suzannah plantations and at An-loc and Loc-ninh. Fifteen years ago those tracts, not yet opened, were frequented by a few tribes of Mois and by herds of wild elephants. Even Annamites would not settle on them, because of the devastating jungle fevers. And yet some there were who dared. Planters took gangs into the rank jungle. They fired acres of forest, dug roads, built villages, laid drains, plowed. Everything seemed to combine against their endeavor. They employed Javanese coolies, already trained to this work; the Dutch government forbade recruiting. They engaged Chinese; the Chinese died by the hundreds. They took on Annamites and Mois. Nothing could get the better of the planters' persistence. They fought their terrible battle with units of men, risking their own skins with those of their coolies. When their colters ripped open the virgin soil, it gave off a deadly miasma. Reinforcements were necessary, always fresh reinforcements. The steamers kept bringing out new recruits from France. Contractors, from no one knew where, produced new regiments of starved natives. Little by little the plantation won against the jungle.

The pioneers did not even have the consolation

of a quick return, of seeing the results of their labor materialize. It took from six to seven years before a single drop of latex could be collected from the young trees they had set out. Despite this, they did not lose courage but pursued their task and cleared new land. So many lanes laid out, so many graves dug. And the slim *Heveas* grew up in long straight lines, like files of crosses.

Finally, at long last, the fever declared itself vanquished. It was put under rules and given its allotment: fifteen corpses a month, for a big enterprise. And the management manufactured its own coffins.

"Fifteen years!" I said to myself, conjuring back the former jungle. Fifteen years ago, possibly twenty, this was a bamboo jungle, intersected with tortuous tracks, a virgin forest with tangled lianas. And to-day big tractors rumble along the road; there are factories, infirmaries, schools.

After all, a mere handful of men accomplished this. As water, drop by drop, wears away a stone, the energy of these men, put forth hour by hour, triumphed over the hardest obstacles. In the face of sickness, coolie desertions, years of drouth, trees that died, storms that washed away

the roads, fires that devastated the plantations—in spite of everything—they had the will-power to see things through. Will-power is not a word but a virtue, a force. It is a weapon in a clenched fist. And now those accursed lands that were not worth one piaster bring fortunes. Vessels load millions of tons of rubber at Saigon. On the balance-sheet of a corporation that is still young, I read, "Capital, ten millions; net profit, four millions and a half."

I had the malice to ask the planter who was showing me around the number of his casualties.

"Of nineteen Frenchmen, seven are now out of commission, two of the seven are in the hospital, and one is embarking 'for France.'"

I have seen some of the defeated. I took one of them on board his boat. He was so weak and his legs shook so that he was unable to get up the gang-plank alone. If the men have to go home on sick-leave before their regular furlough, for which they get half-pay, they are entitled to only a quarter of their regular pay. How can they afford a doctor? Yet all who are able come back, and, so far as the others are concerned, plenty of substitutes are available.

The fascination of the unknown and the hope

of making money some day are the incentives. There is all the mysterious seduction of this country, which cannot be forgotten by any one who has ever known it. There is also, for many, the charm of a life that is certainly less commonplace than it would be in France, in suburban lodgings or some small provincial town. You have your own chalet, servants, a good table, your rifle hanging on the wall between a pair of elephant's tusks, convenient transportation by autobus to the Rue Catinat. You are obeyed; you are somebody!

The novice allows himself to be tempted by the one hundred and fifty to two hundred piasters they offer him at the start. He looks on this fifteen hundred or two thousand francs a month as a bonanza. He has no idea of the prices asked by the Chinese grocer. As for the veteran, habit fetches him back. Where else would he go? When he was suffocating on his balcony over there in Indo-China, in those March days when skies are heavy with storms that never break, he feverishly counted the weeks and thought only of France, "the finest colony." He laid plans and perhaps swore that he never would return. But in France the accumulated piasters slip rapidly away. Pleasures are soon exhausted. The old

friends of other days are no longer to be found; their ideas, their tasks, their concerns, have ceased to be of interest. Among the repatriated there are those who even have a feeling of something akin to degradation. The astute "boy," taken along, is not slow to observe the metamorphosis in his masters. "Monsieurs, maybe so, draw water at pump," he will relate in his own jargon after his return. "Madames, maybe so, cook all same *bep.*"

All this hurts, and finally you begin counting the days again. French life seems banal. What you miss is the colony. It was good to come home, but you are content to leave. Why are the outward-bound voyages, by the Messageries Maritimes, always gayer than the homeward-bound ones? Out there you find your house again, your servants, your friends. You tackle your work once more. You get tired and keep on struggling. Success comes to some—a lucky fall of the dice, a concession obtained, a fortunate speculation. It does not take so very many piasters, at ten francs, to fill a woolen stocking. Or perhaps a day comes when in some small post a group of men in white stand round a freshly opened grave between two pandanus-palms.

The free life of the colonies!

Beyond the plantations are the rice-fields. We are now in western Cochin-China. The brick-red road has ceased to unroll through an interminable park; it stretches along for leagues across a bare, flat country, shadeless except for an occasional meager clump or a hedge of tall bamboos. No more red loam; a yellowish soil, and fields as far as the eye can see. *Nhaques* are transplanting green shoots, knee-deep in water and singing, or reaping the withered plain with sickles. Black buffaloes, naked urchins, water with countless ducks. And every now and then the absurd spectacle of a man who seems to be gleaning fish, hundreds of yards from any watercourse.

The natives have a proverb: "There is one part of water to every two parts of fish in the streams of Annam." This is true, and when the waters recede from the rice-fields in the dry season there are fish enough left in the cracks of the mud to offer a miraculous catch, without net or hook; it is enough merely to stoop over. I was not wrong: they glean the fish.

Annamites and Cambodians, without engineers and without machinery, have been digging canals in western Cochin-China for centuries. They did not wait until our arrival to cultivate this fertile valley of the Mekong. Yet here too it took our

own men, with their determination, to get the full riches out of the land.

Until 1908 certain regions like Phung-hiep were wild jungle, where one hunted bulls and elephants. Not a single rice-field; not a habitation except some poor Cambodian pagoda with a roof of thatch; no water; no roads. Then one day our dredges came along, removing thousands of cubic yards of earth, opening up the arid soil over hundreds of miles, clearing old canals that were filled in. No sooner were the canals cut than planters and natives rushed to sow seed for the first harvest. Within a few years thousands upon thousands of acres were fertilized, from Mytho to Cam-an, from Bac-lieu to Rach-gia; and now Phung-hiep, formerly a miserable spot, boasts its warehouses overflowing with paddy at the intersection of its six radiating canals.

A magic transformation! Chinese towns have sprung up everywhere; for where the *nhaque* labors, there the Chinese trades. Five kilometers of warehouses lie along the Cantho River at Cairang. The canals are entirely hidden by sampans laden with bags. Strings of junks, weighted down with paddy, move along the Mekong and the Grand Bassac. Instead of elephants, a tugboat now does the trumpeting. The whole country is

simply bursting with piasters. There is too much money for the Chinese, the Chettis, and the "usuriculturers" to grab it all; a little is left over for the *nhaques*.

And what do the *nhaques* demand? Would they like to be under the jade scepter of the lord of Hué once more? Do they want more pagodas? Not in the least; they want a rural loan organization to protect them from the profiteers, and savings-banks in which to deposit their money. In this modern world, everything is on a footing of equality. The era of the steam-engine has succeeded that of the palanquin.

The planters themselves are no longer the bushmen of former days. The adventurous life of the pioneers of the conquest is over: the tiger episodes, the pirates, the *datura* that an unknown hand used to pour into your cup. Risks alter with the times. The dangers to-day are floods, drouth, a sudden drop in prices at Cholon. On the terrace of the little hotel at Cantho the planters and officials of the "Cercle Vicieux" no more will be seen eagerly scanning the river for sight of a comrade's boat—a great event in their exile. To-day they all have their own motor-cars; you cross the Bassac by motor-ferry and get to Saigon in the forenoon of the same day,

instead of spending days for the journey, as formerly. Just the same, life is still rough out there in the monotonous regions of western Cochin-China, among the steaming inundated rice-fields.

Often the settler lives quite alone among his Annamites, with not another soul to talk to. Some "go native." Little half-breeds are born, who twitter a strange idiom and eat their rice with chop-sticks. France? One thinks of it less often; it is an uncertain paradise. The dearest faces become nebulous. One writes with growing infrequency. One forgets.

Those who have established themselves on rich land and who meet with no disaster to wreck their enterprise soon achieve success, but there are others who are unlucky. Somehow their coolies are always deserting, their canals are always giving trouble, their plantations catch fire, their standing crops unaccountably wither. And they are caught in the terrible gears. They borrow at thirty and forty per cent, or even more, in order to hang on for another year. If the government refuses to rescue them, these wretched planters will have to wear out their whole lives in paying off the Chinese, reimbursing the Chettis. Why not deal with the large banks? It is not

possible; they lend only to those who are well off.

One might think that all these settlers would be embittered by misfortune, but they are not. If they did not possess courage, they would not be alive at all; their carcasses long since would have fertilized the roots of a banana-tree. They have striven, and they continue to strive, never abandoning hope. They are firm of heart, doubly hardened since they are both colonials and farmers. Gaily they follow a life that for others would be a convict existence, keeping alive all the confidence they had on the first day.

Two types of settlers stand out against each other in my memory: the one who has succeeded, and the one who is still struggling.

I see the first as a kind of patriarch on the colonial farm where he receives me within the domestic circle of sons and daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law—an astonishing repetition of Zola's "Fécondité" in the tropics. Twenty-five years ago he arrived on the scene to take charge of a little farm plantation that was not going well. He found himself in the wilderness, in the heart of Cochin-China or of Cambodia, with no means of communication except by the canals and the river. A village, thatched *cainhas,* a few acres under cultivation, leaky sampans:

that was the whole story. And jungle. Nevertheless he harnessed himself to his task, lived like a coolie, labored barefoot in the slime, ate poor food, slept little. And when I met him, a quarter of a century later, his life had not changed. He wears the same shabby trousers, always goes barefoot in the rice-fields, eats his hunk of bread off a corner of the table. But to-day there is a big factory on his farm; large flatboats are lined up along the bank; agricultural machinery is in operation; he plants twenty thousand acres and employs twelve hundred families; and there is not a bank that would not honor the signature of this barefoot bushman to the amount of millions of francs. That is the accomplishment of the one.

The other settler—his friend and neighbor, in these countries where a neighbor is a day's journey distant—may have put forth an equal effort, but he has not had the same luck. He has faced every kind of setback. When the Department of Public Works dug a new canal that was to have brought him riches, the grade was miscalculated and his land was flooded instead of being irrigated. But he is not crushed. He does not admit his ruin. He possesses the magnificent domain he has dreamed about since youth; it exists in his thoughts, his heart, his glances; it lives in his

hope. He took me over it, and what he said was so convincing, his confidence was so steadfast, that his plantation seemed to rise out of the earth at a gesture of his lean hand.

"See, here are my royal mango-trees, and there, between the two canals, is the big fish-pond."

There was nothing in sight but useless canals, crumbled dikes, and a sparse green growth—but he saw beyond these. To-morrow, always to-morrow!

"That is where I shall plant my mangosteens. You gather your crop from March to May; nothing to do all the rest of the time. And the yield is two hundred piasters per acre. My *areca*-palms, alas, did not bear, but I have found better land, and I am going to plant a thousand feet. One piaster a year per tree; good return, eh? I also count on putting two hundred new acres into rice this year—only selected seed. I want paddy as fine as that of Burma. I shall succeed in getting it."

His projects piled up in confusion, and his knotty fingers were already hard at work. Will he ever get the better of his bad luck? Perhaps.

He lives with half a dozen Annamite women, favoring them by turns, in a house as white and bare as an Arab *bordj*. He jokes about his

harem. The women assist him, assign the work to the native "corporals," keep house for him, watch his stores. When the master goes to spend a few days at Saigon or Hanoi, they remain alone, with no man to defend them, not even a servant; only a loaded gun near the mats on which they sleep.

"If you were twenty years younger and had your life to live over again," I asked this settler, "where would you go?"

He looked at me, tapped a heel on his land, and replied, "Here."

I met many of these exiled Frenchmen between the shores of the Red River and the soft banks of the Mekong. They have been forgotten, off on their farms, at their little posts, in forest cabins, where they live eternally alone, among the natives, meeting a white person only by accident. For the harassed city-dweller, the word "solitude" evokes a thought of composure and relaxation. But what does it mean to those who endure it months and years?

At a distance, I find the life they all lead still more romantic. There was a little inspector of militia, commander of a somnolent port, with books and magazines piled up on all his chairs and

tables. There was a Belgian engineer, whose rustic dwelling was planted on a mountain near the railway-line, whose only companion was a large gibbon, which he had taught to smoke. There was that astounding missionary, the only white man in the region, who had organized a band among his Muong converts and had these children of the forest playing hymns and military marches. There was a young forest inspector from the outskirts of Paris; until the war, he had never got beyond the quarter of the Temple, and then he had taken a flying leap to the Annamese forests, where he now lived alone with his wife in the heart of the jungle, thinking of nothing but hunting. And there was that scientist who worked for months on end in the swamps of the Plaine des Joncs, in a veritable cloud of mosquitos.

Their complexions become tanned, their tastes shift, their manners change; but let a Frenchman come on the scene, and immediately they resume their former personalities, as one might put on a coat. There are only a few whose minds are actually affected by this solitary existence, but they are harmless lunatics, put on earth, one might almost believe, to make copy for transient writers. The former government official who

turned hermit and who now lives in retirement on a little island in the gulf of Siam, where he trades nobody knows what with the Chinese, is one of them. He visits the coast only on very special occasions, for instance, at election-time, when he exults in casting one ballot for his forgotten hero, the assassin Ravachol. Is he crazy? Not a bit of it. He is, on the contrary, exceedingly cultivated and intelligent and is rational enough to be making himself rich, and he amuses himself addressing complaints to the governor in Latin.

It is true that one also meets imbeciles, like the simpleton with a Gascon accent who accosted me in the little hotel at Cantho. His whole eloquence consisted in repeating with naïve indignation:

"Everything is going to hell, I tell you. Imagine not having the right to thrash my 'boy' if I please! The rod, sir; that is what is needed!"

But those old ex-regulars who believed in educating the *nhaque* with a cane have now become rare. No absinthe was offered me when I put in an appearance. Instead, on arriving at some remote little station, I noticed on the tables the latest Paris reviews and parcels of books forwarded from Hanoi or Saigon. What endurance these men must have to bear the burden of their

every-day life without growing weak or bitter! It is true that they are not all real exiles from the world. In the district seats and larger trading-centers, besides the administrator or the resident, there are always a few Europeans, some of whom are married. There is sure to be one business man, one customs officer, one settler, one police official. But in spite of these asociations, may there not often be moral solitude as hard to bear as the other kind?

I remember, for instance, being the guest of one evening in a modest drawing-room at a lonely substation. There was no electric fan, only the punka of other days with a "boy," half asleep, pulling the cord. Big lamps, which made the air all the more stifling, furnished the sole illumination. The deputy, who had not been expecting me, hastily invited in a few Frenchmen of the neighborhood, including the local police officer.

I have never met a person so dull and so cumbersome as this mustachioed sergeant. The deputy, a discerning chap who knew the natives perfectly, could not get a word in edgewise nor answer a single one of my questions. Every time the lout would break in with his tiresome, "I'll tell you all about that."

He talked with his mouth full, gravy smeared

KING SISOWATT ACCOMPANYING A FRENCH GOVERNOR GENERAL THROUGH THE PNOM-PENH PALACE GROUNDS

over his face, and he wore me out with his tales. He was one of those colonials who spend twenty years in a country and leave it without having seen or understood anything. The deputy sat looking at me with an expression of despair. At dessert the sergeant, now in full swing, undertook to figure as a wit. He seized the champagne-bottle to fill our glasses again and indulged in various tavern pleasantries, first moaning as the champagne came out and then pretending to milk the bottle. He finished by announcing:

"Mr. Deputy, now you can add this bottle to your curio collection and tell people that it refreshed six men; it will be the greatest treasure in the collection!"

At last some duty called him away, and we obtained a moment of respite. With a faint smile the deputy remarked, "My sole friend!"

And it was the sad truth. The settler seldom left his land; the representative of the Department of Public Works was a bird of passage; the customs officer often was away. But the sergeant came regularly every evening, and the young administrator was actually glad to see him: he was somebody; at least he was a white man!

Not all are capable of displaying his philosophical indulgence. Proximity rarely unites

individuals; it drives them to exasperation. Human beings may end by detesting one another simply because they are compelled to live perpetually together. When that happens, you find a wretched post in which the six Frenchmen who make up the whole white population never speak, never look at one another, do nothing but hate one another. Yet there they are, all stewing in the same pot. Heat, sultriness, and sleepless nights have strained their nerves to the breaking-point. A word, a posture, a look, will be enough to start a quarrel.

"Why did every one get angry," wailed the resident's wife, a young Parisian with mournful eyes, who was telling me her troubles, "because I invited the wife of the liquor-dealer to tea twice in succession and the surveyor's wife only once?"

As a result, the little French colony in that Annamese district seat had split into two factions, which incessantly reviled and endeavored to damage each other.

The trouble often arises in some such way, out of the vanity or jealous disposition of a woman. In another case, it is all on account of a duck, worth twenty cents, which a deputy insists that his neighbor the judge has stolen. Ridiculous

quarrels! Village squabbles! Living on top of one another as they do, with never a breath of air from outside, nothing ever happening to divert their minds, they presently develop an obsession. They live only to detest one another. This lasts until a day of sudden danger or sickness. Then the enemies come running, forgetting everything else. After all, solidarity among colonials is something more than a mere name. But why rend one another in this fashion? The answer is the climate, the enervating atmosphere.

The Annamite makes no effort to resist but simply lets himself drift. It might be said that he lives at slow tempo; his everlasting relaxation rests him like sleep. The European on the other hand wants to have all his accustomed energy, and in the effort to surmount the mental lassitude that assails him, his nerves, if he is weak, give out.

The nights are not conducive to rest, and the middle of the day is simply unendurable. The torpor of the siesta hour, when all nature lies stunned under the terrible sun, is unimaginable. Not a sound, not a breath of air. Where are the murmuring forests of France? Birds sleep in the trees; even the leaves sleep. Not one thing stirs. Village hens and yellow dogs and black

pigs take their rest too in a corner of the *cainha*. The shops and offices close in the cities, and the streets are deserted. A rickshaw feebly crawls past. Under the trees and the verandas the coolies stretch out by dozens, their thin legs overlapping and their rags mingled together. Not a European is abroad. Everybody sleeps with the fan turned on near the bed. Two hours of broken napping, bathed in perspiration, and you get up. Work begins again. You leave the house, still only half alive, jump into a rickshaw with a burning-hot seat, and remain shut up in office, factory, or shop until the end of the afternoon.

And every bit of the work is for the colony, even the scratching of pens. The planter among his rubber-trees, the scientist in his laboratory, the archæologist in the midst of his ruins, the doctor in his hospital room, the manufacturer at his plant, the resident inspecting his villages, all coöperate to the same end. They have made Indo-China.

I am haunted by a phrase, a prediction handed down among the Cambodians for centuries: "Some day men will come from the other side of the world and rebuild the city." On a certain day men came—Frenchmen—who have rebuilt the fallen palaces stone by stone, rediscovered the

lost temples in the jungle. And as they have re-created Angkor, it is these same Frenchmen who likewise have rebuilt Annam and Cambodia.

The reader who wants something exotic at any price will wish to know what is happening to the mandarins in this turmoil of change and where the great adventurers are to be found.

I have already said that the face of the world is different. The mandarins, the real mandarins of to-day, are no longer Asiatic gentlemen in silk gowns, proud of their long finger-nails, who go in palanquins to visit the tombs of their ancestors. They are bankers and merchants and high officials. Adventurers, with rifles slung over their shoulders, like that remarkable Marie de Mayréna who had himself crowned king of the Sedangs, are no longer to be met with. Their battle, instead of being waged in the jungle, is waged on the Bourse. An electric fan on the ceiling, the rate of piasters stuck upon the wall—that is your modern pagoda. Occasionally in the streets of Saigon or Hanoi, a jovial grizzled veteran is pointed out. As a rule the men of his type were strong as gaurs or buffaloes, the only animals not dying off in this climate.

"Look at him! He's one of our last adven-

turers! The things he didn't do twenty years ago!" And the remark is accompanied by a wink.

But these men are no longer part of the living realities; they are left-overs, curiosities like the small pagoda of the Petit Lac or the sanctuary of Po Nagar. As for their adventures, they were sorry affairs. Piasters extorted from the Chinese, piasters extracted from the budget, concessions obtained for nothing and sold dear, tricky contracts, underhand dealings in opium and salt, alcohol and rice. To-day the rascality has been forgotten; it has all become part of the legend.

The adventurers of the present are not so picturesque; they have less courage and a different kind of ability. To begin with, they have that power, which they share with the gods, of making themselves invisible. Who is it owns the mines, factories, banks, warehouses, steamships, plantations? No one knows.

In other days colonials arrived, threw themselves into the struggle, made fortunes. This was legitimate. The fleece had to be golden to lure Jason. Some of them in the end shared their wealth with the colony. They created new enterprises, put land into cultivation, built factories.

But the encroachment of capital has upset the old scheme of things. Capital has meant profits for Europe, exploitation for the colony. There are no more sturdy pioneers, but hirelings merely. Everything that can be made to yield, finance lays hold of.

In the map of Indo-China, the official divisions still remain: Annam, Tongking, Cochin-China, Cambodia, Laos. But these names no longer mean anything in particular. One should read instead: rice, rubber, coal, cement, cotton, zinc, copra—the new states!

The chief sovereign is no longer the governor-general, residing at Hanoi in his palace that is a little too new, nor the emperor of Annam in his Forbidden Purple City, nor old King Sisowath in his strange dwelling with spired roofs. The sole master is money. Symbolism is not any longer to be found in the brush of the scholar but in the bank. The colonists' concessions are bought up, big estates are cut out of the middle of the jungles, factories are built, the most insignificant enterprises are heavily overcapitalized, the mountains are drilled in the hope of finding oil or tin.

"We want healthy money," say the financiers in their jargon. They have chosen the piaster, and capital flows, flows, flows.

For good or for evil? My judgment depends often on the color of the day; there is a perpetual struggle between my reflective self and my indignant self.

Good, no doubt, since the jungle is to produce, the mountain to give up its riches, the country to expand with the development of canals and roads; good, since the whole world has need of raw materials, and searching for these, wherever they are to be found, is the sole excuse for colonization; good, since French capital, if it is not invested here, will go to alien enterprises; good, since without this investment no undertaking could be launched, and the Chetti or the Chinese money-lender would reign with greater harshness than ever.

But at the same time capital investment is bad because the speculations—monopolies, in fact—are going to increase hatred toward us; bad because France did not go out to conquer these distant lands for the sole benefit of a hundred fat concessionaries; bad because many of the enterprises are unsound and are going to collapse; bad because the native, freed by France from the oppression of the mandarins, is now falling under the control of new tyrants; bad because small grievances make big revolts; bad, finally, because

on the other side of the Chinese border four hundred million Asiatics are watching.

Since this second invasion of the colony, the fortune of war, Frenchmen out there have enjoyed, at least for a little space, a larger life and greater happiness. The small official who for twenty years found it difficult to earn from sixty to a hundred and thirty piasters a month, at a time when the piaster was worth only fifty cents, to-day earns enough to live on. He is not reduced to filtering his water in a jar filled with powdered charcoal because he lacks the sixty francs with which to buy a proper filter. Business men have made fortunes and retired. Enterprises that were on the verge of failure have been bought over at sky-high prices. But is not this sudden prosperity, which has attracted the worst type of investor to the Far East, destined soon to collapse? What is going to happen when the whole colony comes to be exploited on a vast scale by unknown masters?

If our statesmen and governors, yielding to the pressure exerted by profiteers in Indo-China, apply the old policy of force, refuse to grant to the natives a more liberal measure of rights and privileges, do nothing to increase their welfare, and go on considering them merely as living tools

to serve their own interests, France will lose the finest part of its empire within thirty years.

Already wealth has become destructive, like a cancer. It creates envy. While strings of great motor-cars parade the streets of Saigon, filled with sprawling *nouveaux riches* who were shuffling along in slippers ten years ago, the little fellows, who do not make much, are hanging on, waiting for a drop in prices and learning how to hate.

That fellow with a pimply face there is another war-profiteer. While other men of his age, at the risk of being torpedoed, were on their way to France to enlist for the front, he was making a fortune. He weighs nearly two hundred pounds and has the shoulders of a furniture-mover, but he has never gone farther than the trenches of Thu-daumot and has never drawn a bayonet except in front of the Bois du Fou, at the gates of Saigon. To-day this specimen is worth thirty to forty million francs!

Although many a scandalous fortune has been made since 1914, the revenue-collector of Indo-China cares nothing about it. None of the French laws have been applied out here; there is no tax on war-profits, and none even on incomes. Of the

rich all over the world, those of our colony are certainly among the most favored, since they keep everything for themselves, down to the last piaster. They are as miserly with their gold as they were with their blood.

The piaster acts like a virus. It produces a terrible fever of attack and accusation. The very colonials who loudly rebuke those writers who have faithfully depicted them in unflattering colors, give to the transient Frenchman only the worst of impressions. Perhaps the abominable climate is the explanation. The tales I was told —of the provost marshal with a million francs in the bank, the creole magistrate who collected a toll on the river-front along his own property and arraigned all who evaded it before his own tribunal, the pretty woman who was seen at the door of a Chinese millionaire. Facts or malicious gossip?

Why did no one mention the retired governor of sixty, who, in order to feed his family, was forced to teach mathematics in France? And the colonial woman planter who had to fight twenty years of bad luck before she could make anything at all out of her investment? And the emaciated bishop, operated upon six times for his liver, who

sleeps on a mat like a coolie and who, faithful to his apostleship, has never seen France once since the beginning of the century? And the scientist, celebrated at thirty years of age, who has consecrated his life to the Pasteur Institute of the colony? And all those engineers, officials, and employees who fell beside the roads they were building through the jungle? And, oh, so many others!

But evil, in all latitudes, has ever exercised a greater attraction than good, and malice is more easily hawked than praise. The most vindictive of my self-constituted informants was a short man, reported to have grown rich smuggling opium. He was pitiless in his judgments and saw nothing but scoundrels, grafters, and liars on every side. One day, in disgust, I mentioned the name of a governor who had just died, leaving his family quite destitute.

"And how about him?" I demanded.

He was stumped, but only for a moment.

"*Parbleu!* He didn't have time enough!"

Sometimes when I had been hearing too many of his diatribes I went to unload my heaviness of spirit on a merchant in Cholon, a fat-bellied Buddha with gold teeth, from whom I enjoyed buying useless trifles. He could not under-

stand a single word I said, chattered goodness knows what in his own language, and probably thought me crazy, and we got along perfectly together.

"You wouldn't believe the things one is forced to listen to! This world is certainly a wicked place. I have just been told that—"

If he had understood me and repeated the gossip—O barber of King Midas! But he was a discreet Chinaman. I shall also be discreet. This handful of intriguers, profiteers, and foolish women who play at high society and give ridiculous receptions in which the men all stay on one side of the room and the women on the other, like Sunday mass, are not worth thinking about. There are enough resolute men and courageous wives to make you forget the others.

The old colonials, used up by their hard work, and these young men of twenty-five who came safely through the war and left smiling France to establish themselves in this land of fever, merit something more than sarcasm. The younger ones will benefit by the labor of those who went before. They at least arrive in a country that has been rendered fairly healthful and where life is now normal. They will never know the months of exile in besieged towns, the hardships of meager

salaries, the continual fighting against fever. Life for them will be much easier. But an ominous portent is to be read in their skies: Indo-China has just entered the sign of the piaster, the thirteenth of the zodiac.

CHAPTER XI

THE LEPERS OF DRAGON ISLAND

"DON'T be frightened. You will see how nice they are," Sister Adeline often said to me, when I talked to her about her neighbors, the lepers of Cu-lao Rong.

Nice! Yes, she said nice.

I was very fond of Sister Adeline, and I admired her beyond words. First she had lived for twelve years in French Guiana, and after that she had come to Indo-China, where for more than twenty years now she had been taking care of the sick. When she arrived at the hospital of Mytho she asked permission to serve at the leper station.

"I like contagious cases best," she said simply, with her eternal smile.

In all this time, she has never left her sick—cholera, smallpox, and typhus victims and the insane—whom their families bring in to the hospital only after the bone-setters and the sorcerers have abandoned them and no one dares go near them any more.

"Really, sister, you astonish me," I used to say to her. "You are afraid of nothing."

"Oh, but I am," she would answer. "I am very timid. There are three things that frighten me terribly: the devil, thunder, and snakes."

One may hear thunder often enough, scolding away at the end of the dry season when the black rain-clouds begin to pile up, and there is no dearth of snakes. As to the devil, Sister Adeline will never see him!

Without a murmur of complaint, she endures the oppressive climate of Cochin-China. She runs about tirelessly at noon, while the rest of us are taking our siestas. She it was who persuaded me to go and see Cu-lao Rong.

After my visit to the leper colony at Kien-luang in Tongking, my heart was firmly set against ever beholding lepers again. I could not get out of my mind the picture of those hundred or more miserable wretches who came crawling out of their hovels and attached themselves to my heels with groans and prostrations: *"Giet qua! Kho cam!* —We are cold! We are miserable!" That day I was actually ashamed of being a white man, ashamed of being conducted among them as a personage whom those unfortunates must have mistaken for some official inspector.

"They are not bad, you know, the poor devils," said the old fellow in charge. He pointed out his handful of soldiers, proud of their green belts, and added, "I am much more afraid of those good-for-nothings."

The lepers of Kien-luang are herded together in a kind of camp that is destroyed every year by typhoons and floods. No one has the courage any more even to try to repair the huts. During the last rainy season, when the roofs were carried away, the lepers took refuge in the chapel that was built by the peasant hands of the Father, without the assistance of any architect or mason. The Father himself is no longer permitted to live in the village with his lepers. A charming spot to choose to live in—not one that many would envy him! So he has installed himself close by, in a miserable little dwelling, and may be seen, morning and evening, passing to and fro along the dike leading to the camp. In this way religious freedom is safeguarded!

Religious freedom, liberty of belief, are phrases that seem rather absurd when they are applied to those seven hundred victims of the world's neglect. Not a single Annamite of position, no village headman nor mandarin, has ever entered this accursed colony to bring one word of hope,

of promise, or of pity. But a missionary came, and little by little the lepers went over to Christianity, simply because a Christian was there who spoke kindly to them.

To-day these scarcely human creatures, with purple-colored limbs rotting away, wear scapulars round their necks. Every night, by turn, one of them sleeps like a watch-dog at the door of the chapel, lest some one steal their only treasures: the red and gold canopy in which the Virgin rides out on processional days, a few embroidered banners, and the chalice.

The lepers of Kien-luang were not all horrible to look at. I remember one girl, almost pretty, in whom as yet the disease showed itself only in the blotched cheeks. An old woman, whose face was eaten away, told her to put her arms round me. They all began to laugh; and one held out to me frightful stumps, formless hands from which the fingers had dropped. This troupe of dancers on the edge of the grave was ghastly. Those whose gangrenous feet would no longer support them raised themselves on their beds and peered at me, with swollen or scabby faces, and they too laughed horribly. My last sight as I was leaving was a coffin, newly made that morning out of the rotten planks of an old boat by the lepers them-

selves, for one of their number. It stood on end before the main house, like a sentry-box. Wood, it seems, is dear, and the lepers have as an allowance only three piasters a month on which to feed themselves. No wonder the memory of Kien-luang haunted me. But thanks to Sister Adeline, another memory has now effaced it.

Cu-lao Rong, Dragon Island, lifts its palms from the middle of the Mekong in front of Mytho. The river is so wide here and the tides are so strong that the crossing is difficult. The current is likely to drag the boat far below the landing-place. The Mekong is eating away one side of the island while it is making deposits on the other, so that some day Cu-lao Rong in all probability will attach itself to the bank. And this is the leper island.

When the terrible word "leper" is mentioned, a jumble of everything a European has ever read immediately leaps into his mind. He sees miserable beings, without lips and without eyelids, waiting for the ghastly end; he sees scaly faces and hears the castanets that used to warn people from the way. Side by side are the leper of the Middle Ages, listening to his mass for the dead, and the leper of the Cité d'Aoste, in his poor cabin, uttering lamentations. But the reality is quite other-

wise. I look back, honestly trying to be truthful and refusing to indulge in forced emotions, and there, in front of a row of open-air bungalows in a tropical garden, I see people dancing. Such was, in truth, my first sight of the lepers at Cu-lao Rong. As soon as they saw us, they came hurrying up from every side. One leper had on an enormous dragon-head of painted cardboard, and two others were holding up the red cloth tail. Retreating step by step before us, they proceeded with their dance. How different this was from what I had been expecting—this burlesque dance with twenty leprosy-bitten exiles looking on and laughing!

In order to stir the heart of the reader, I might stoop to paint a readier picture. I might depict these outcasts looking with bitter hatred at the happy shore where others dwell, searching out on the river-junks the tiny figures of the oarsmen. But why lie? Humanity, of whatever color of skin, adapts itself to all misfortunes, all sufferings. There is no extremity of agony to which, in the end, it cannot grow accustomed. Time heals the wounds even of these. It is something just to be alive!

There is a marvelous feeling, much bigger than the mere horror of the thing, in seeing human be-

ings with flesh rotted away who nevertheless still can hope, believe in the future, manage to carve some wretched little happiness out of their sufferings. Death? They are on intimate terms with death. It holds no terror for them. And, dancing, they forget that they are condemned to die.

The leper who was prancing about with the luridly painted head of a dragon finally removed his heavy mask.

"That was very good, Milot," remarked the director.

Milot? He understood French? I looked at him more closely. The dancer had the typical leper look, but under his puffy candle-colored face I caught a trace of something European.

"He is not an Annamite?" I asked.

"No, French," one of the sisters explained. "He is about seventeen years old. We know only that his first name is Emile, but he has always been called Milot. His parents—servants in the household of some official, it is thought—abandoned him at Cholon when they went back to France, because he had contracted leprosy. He was six years old at that time. He has been here ever since."

Holding his straw hat in front of him, Milot stared at us. What was he thinking as he looked

at these Frenchmen, white men like his father? Only Fate really writes stories like this. If an author attempts to do so, no one believes in his tales. I gave a piaster to Milot, drawing back my hand rather quickly, in spite of myself, when he held out his.

Will these lines, I wonder, ever fall under the eyes of the hard-hearted mother and the wretch who in 1913 abandoned this child at a street corner, much as one might purposely lose a dog? I wish they might. I should like them to know that on an island in the Mekong, among the lepers, their child dances for visitors, in order to beg a few coppers.

"So he is not dead?" I hear them ask.

No, not yet; be patient a little while longer.

Some, with faces repulsively puffy, like a cauliflower, are terrible to look at; but the disease selects especially the hands and feet for attack. You see blue feet wasting away and hands all contracted, with fingers rapidly disappearing. The living flesh simply rots. An old woman was crouching on a piece of matting and rocking back and forth. Frightful, she was—flesh raw as if she had been plunged into boiling oil!

"The poor thing!" murmurs the sister. "She must have another injection."

They keep her under the influence of morphine, to let her die a little more peacefully. The other women in the dormitory do not look at her any more; they have grown used to her.

There is a little canal separating the quarters for the men and the women, but in the evening they cross over and meet in the gardens. The director closes his eyes and the sisters close theirs, though the lepers can be heard talking and singing behind the bamboo hedges. The merciful darkness hides them from one another. When a child is born, at first the mother nurses it, but as soon as it is weaned, if it proves to be "clean," it is taken away and turned over to an institution or to other members of the family. If it has been contaminated, it is left in the colony, and makes one leper the more.

It is like a living cemetery, this island where no one ever lands. When a steamer passes, out in the river, with a crowd of tourists on board, some one always points and says, "There is the leper island." Immediately all the women assume the same expression of fear and pity. How many would be willing to land, even for a moment, if one pleaded with them? Well, women exist, willing to live in the midst of these gangrenous lepers who carry contamination. A young doc-

tor, who could perfectly well take care of sick people at home and go driving about his province in a buggy, undertakes to look after them, and he touches their putrid sores without disgust. Duty? A word that scarcely cancels heroism!

Before persons of this caliber I was ashamed to spend so much time washing my hands at the end of my visit. I could not sprinkle sufficient disinfectant over myself.

"It is better to take precautions," one of the sisters remarked without mockery. "You can catch it easily."

Twenty years ago these women with their simply dressed hair left France, knowing that they were going out to care for lepers and that they would never return. Since that time, countless steamers have returned to Marseilles with merchants who have waxed rich; a good many of them have been decorated in these past years—they have rendered valuable services to the colony, it seems.

But my thought goes back to the saintly Sister Brigitte, of the order of Saint Paul de Chartres. While taking care of lepers at Bangkok, she contracted the malady and died, smiling, in a little white house on Dragon Island.

STATE ELEPHANTS OF THE KING OF CAMBODIA LINED UP IN THE GROUNDS OF THE PALACE AT PNOM PENH

CHAPTER XII

PILGRIMS TO ANGKOR

ON the way from Pnom-penh, at Kampong-luang des Lacs, where one transfers to the small boat for the Viam, or mouth, of the Siem-reap River, the last stage on the way to the ruins, one suddenly sees on the right a large sign, fastened to two posts. Dumfounded, one reads this: "*Pèlerins d'Angkor,* turn to the right." Motorists are thus diverted to the road leading to the jetty.

Nothing more is needed to change the whole spirit of the journey and wipe out the spell created by the fleeting visions of forests with flowering vines, tiny villages on piles, huge, grazing buffaloes with birds perched on their backs, naked children splashing in the water with their skin glistening in the sun like fish-scales, flights of egrets overhead, pagoda-cocks and barrister-birds with black wings and coral-headed cranes. At last to escape the civilized colony, really to penetrate ancient Asia, the hospitable and mar-

velous Kambudja, whither all the wistful beauty of the world seems to have sought refuge! Then, presto! one comes upon this sign-board of the Motor Club, ridiculous homage to the memory of Loti, and back one drops to earth with a thud. Civilization has penetrated everywhere, and there is nothing for it but to resign oneself. "*Le monde est plus grand que tu ne crois,*" wrote Renan. But things have changed. To-day he would have to write, "The world is much smaller than you think."

To go to Angkor is no longer a feat. Sampans that lose their way in the meanderings of the submerged forest, the bullock-cart racking and shaking the poor occupant in the ruts of the road, the siesta taken on the stone causeway out of fear of snakes—all this sort of thing is finished. No longer do you have to beg shelter, like Loti, from the priests. Pending the realization of the palatial hotel for which the plans are drawn and the location selected, you get down at the *sala* of Angkor, a small hotel built in European style, with showers and screened rooms. If you are rich, you can make the whole journey from Saigon by motor in fifteen hours; if you husband your piasters, you will choose the service of the Messageries Fluviales and perhaps get stranded, like

a certain Englishwoman whose boat stuck fast in the mud, during the season of low water. She had to spend thirty-six hours on the lake, alone with the resigned rowers and a young Frenchman, before whom she was compelled to perform what were doubtless the most wretched acts of her life.

You need not expect any more to cover the last lap from Siem-reap to Angkor Wat on the back of a royal elephant, trampling down the underbrush, tearing up shrubs, and breaking off branches. A good macadam road now leads to the *sala,* and it has been extended in a circuit of the various temples through forty kilometers of forest. It is true that a couple of beasts with trumpets are attached to the hotel, but they are there for the same reason that there are goat-carriages in the Champs-Elysées. *"C'est pour la regardelle,"* as they say in the Midi. And small trucks line up near the mounting-platform for the elephants.

From the moment of my arrival at the lake I was prepared for the truth. It was enough for me simply to read on the sign-board the symbolic preface: *"Pèlerins d'Angkor,* turn to the right."

Nevertheless, what perfect joy would have stirred in the heart of Pierre Loti had he arrived in comfort as we did, at the end of the day,

instead of painfully climbing down from his bullock-cart under the crushing noonday sun. His disenchanted confession may be remembered: "Nous nous sentions pris par le sommeil, à force de cahots, de bercements et de chaleur. . . . Je n'ai pas l'émotion que j'aurais attendue. . . . Midi approche avec sa lassitude et son invincible somnolence."

Less than ever do I regret the tiresome picturesqueness of former times, the nights passed on the hard decks of boats, the journey in solitude through the jungle. I arrive, and I am by no means exhausted; I feel no humiliating need of rest. Ready to enjoy things to the full, I look around me, and suddenly, at a turn of the road, there is the vision of Angkor Wat—the bare stretch, the moat covered with water-lilies and reeds, the long, delicate colonnade, the stone roofs, the five gray towers, the five tiaras at last, marvelously lifting from the heart of the temple.

One look suffices to take it all in; a click, and the snap-shot is made and abruptly superimposed on that picture of Angkor we all cherish in our hearts. One glance, and the thing is done. Now there is only a single image, less tall than that of the mind's eye—for the towers scarcely dominate, seen from a distance—but incredibly long, with

DETAIL OF A FRIEZE OF SACRED DANCERS CARVED IN HIGH RELIEF ON THE GRAY WALLS OF ANGKOR WAT

a girdling gallery pierced by countless openings, with stairways, terraces, vast spaces. As the car flies along, the impression grows that it is one's own eagerness to see things at closer range which carries one swiftly toward the reality.

When I arrived at the bungalow, I had no wish to stop. As soon as my luggage had been deposited, without having the slightest idea of where I was going, I went on along the road.

Now for the first time I began to understand what Angkor was—a dream in ruins, a treasure in stone swallowed up by the forest. As the car passed, wild peacocks and russet-winged pagoda-cocks flew up ahead. At each moment some new surprise awaited me. Everywhere I saw towers, temples, terraces, basins, palaces. And these repeated themselves all along the road for miles, incalculable marvels flung down among the trees.

Once this was the heart of a sumptuous kingdom; Angkor Thom alone is larger than was the Rome of Augustus. But after centuries of splendor came the debacle—invasions, epidemics, revolts—and nothing now remains but the stubborn, indomitable forest. Gradually this drew close, filled up the moats, scaled the ramparts, invaded the streets, and for eight centuries now it has been feeding on the temples and the palaces, knocking

down their walls with its mighty trunks, hiding the bas-reliefs under lichens, with its roots ripping up the terraces where *nagas* watched, the flagged causeways that withstood the tread of elephants, utterly laying waste the superb city. To-day it has to be rebuilt stone by stone and the earth removed in a search for fragments of pillars, steles, and statues, which each year the vegetation has covered with a thicker winding-sheet.

As the car proceeds along an avenue bordered with gigantic banians and strange trees hung with orchids, one takes it for granted, now that the five marvelous tiaras have been left behind, that only secondary monuments remain. But the wonder does not cease. Within a few minutes, there grows up ahead, cutting the road, a monumental gateway. Angkor Thom, the royal city! Never shall I forget the stone smile that welcomed me as I entered its precincts; a gray tower cleft by time, and surmounting the narrow arch four human faces crowned with a lotus flower, laughing to the four winds of heaven! On each side of the approach, giants of stone were upholding a *naga*, a monstrous snake with seven heads rising in the shape of a fan. Arms, legs and torsos still lay about in the ditch, the scattered débris of a formidable puzzle.

I want to see all there is to see, fill my eyes and heart to overflowing; I do not stop. The motor speeds along, and suddenly there is the Bayon, impressive as a great cathedral, with its forty and more towers, uplifting their four faces crowned with diadems. I am to see again, everywhere, from now on, those indecipherable faces—of Brahma, it was formerly thought, of Siva, it is supposed to-day—faces that wear the same enigmatic smile seen on the faces of the tower, where they are twice the height of a man, as well as on worn stones no larger than the land, picked up in the grass.

Here, in front of the Royal Terrace, the car makes the circuit of the vast esplanade. Overgrown ruins are to be seen on all sides: the Elephant Terrace and its long sculptured wall, along which these ponderous animals have been marching for a thousand years; fantastic birds with the body of a tiger, supporting the cornices and guarding the steps; innumerable personages crowding the Terrace of the Leper King; towers of rose-colored brick and others of gray stone, covered with mold.

It is impossible to take in everything. Around me, in front, back of me, still other vestiges rise up and vanish, like a film projected on a dozen

screens at the same time. I have merely to utter one word of command in order to arrest the images, make them stand still. But my febrile curiosity cannot fix itself. On, still on! I wish this first day to discover the whole of Angkor, to draw in my mind's eye the magic plan and be able in dream to walk about at whim.

Once more we plunge into the woods. Parrakeets call from the tree-tops. Other sharp cries become audible—monkeys chattering farewell greetings to one another as they cling to the ends of the branches. A small deer, catching sight of us, disappears with one bound into the underbrush. The vast silence now broken by jungle voices and the air suddenly become a trifle cooler give a hint of approaching night. The sun is just vanishing behind the trees. Overhead the sky is the same gray-blue color, but in another minute, without any half-light, everything will grow dark and night will hang out its black veils.

The self-appointed Cambodian guide beside the chauffeur keeps passing on absurd information in his insistent staccato voice. Previously put on my guard, I do not listen. What, I wonder, is the oral tradition in every sight-seeing place and in all the museums of the world, requiring cicerones to

THE TOWERS CROWNING THE THIRD STORY OF ANGKOR WAT

recite utter nonsense and give vent to inaccurate statements?

"The Palace of the Queen Mother," remarks my imperturbable Cambodian, pointing his finger. Queen of what? Mother of whom? But what difference does it make! Let him talk.

I make no effort any more to keep track of the ruins. Fallen towers, a little temple surrounded by still water, granite elephants at the edge of a terrace. I want only to fix them, on this red road twisting through the trees, in my inner dream.

The forest divides abruptly, and a vast basin appears, covered with reeds; in the middle of the Sras-srang is a little fairy tree, marvelously white. So many egrets are perched on it that it looks like a bouquet of orange blossoms. Now the forest again, more somber after the break. We come to an old bridge with narrow arches. Natives with brick-colored bodies smile from the entrance of some huts. Suddenly the five towers reappear above the trees. On the right, surrounded by palms, is a group of wooden houses raised on piles, and men in yellow robes with shaven heads come and go among them. This is the monastery, the same monastery where, in one of the little houses, Loti slept twenty years ago, above the bullock-drivers camping below.

At the end of the tour, I found myself already looking at Angkor Wat with different eyes. It seemed to me less mysterious, no longer an isolated marvel. The sanctuary of the five towers was connected with all those other monuments whose names I did not even know as yet, but which imagination could evoke at will, with their ruined walls and broken pediments, their esplanades and their basins, scattered under the banians of the enchanted forest.

Despite all that I had seen, I was not satiated. The great temple drew me, and I watched it change color and almost change form in the gathering night. Dinner was a fantastic affair, amusing only in retrospect. The bungalow was filled with clouds of mosquitos. Japanese incense-sticks burned on every table; the women wrapped their ankles in napkins or newspapers, and the men kept slapping at their white, blood-spotted trousers. As soon as the repast was over, wishing to be alone, I walked off in the direction of Angkor Wat, which was silhouetted with surprising sharpness in the clear night. I started along the causeway, paved with cyclopean blocks of stone, leading across the moat. Thousands of frogs were singing all around. No guide nor light was necessary; the starry sky showed me the way.

The long protecting outer gallery grew sharper with each step. I could see distinctly the high foundation, the pillars, the heavy cornices.

The Bayon is like an overpowering cathedral, minus the nave and the pointed arches and without the height; Angkor Wat is the Louvre but more austere, a Louvre roofed with stone, with steep stairs, confusing galleries and dark rooms, a barbaric Louvre.

I looked at it for a long time. I made a great mental effort to animate this sleeping palace, to give it back its magnificent life of the days when Suryavarman used to leave his royal dwelling for a day and come here, standing aloft on an elephant, sacred sword in hand, escorted by a bodyguard of armed maidens, of dancing-girls with flowers in their hair, Brahmans carrying the sacred fire, concubines in palanquins. But I could see nothing. My imagination was powerless to revive those processions. Yet they passed along these very stones that I was treading, and the frogs in the stone basins sang then as now. Seven hundred years ago they were seen by Tcheou Ta-kouan, the Chinese traveler whose account I have read and reread.

The things we learn late, however, do not really have time to become part of us, to create in our

minds imperishable pictures that a single word will be enough to call up. In Rome we fill the Forum at a glance and see the legions of Hadrian passing in Trajan's Forum. We see the triumphant return of Alcibiades to Athens and catch sight of Phryne seated on the steps of the Parthenon. At Avignon we encounter the beneficent Charles VI and his mitered followers, and on the old stones of Aix we recreate with a smile King René. Here in this mysterious kingdom, which flourished for more than six centuries, the entire history of which, O vanity! is recorded on a few broken steles, we walk about blindly, vainly seeking the ghosts. This is a world about which we do not actually know anything. It is a world of legend, hidden in the mists of the vague past.

Thoughts like these may have explained why I felt strangely depressed as I climbed the high steps; or was it simply because I felt so solitary, alone in the night, before the immensity of this deserted edifice? I entered and began walking at random in the long gallery, stretching away right and left. A horrible stench, like wild animals and musk, choked me. My steps echoed strangely in the dark corridor as I groped my way. Presently I became aware of little sharp cries over my head, the cries of frightened crea-

TAPESTRY-LIKE CARVINGS ON AN OUTSIDE WALL OF ANGKOR WAT

tures everywhere calling to one another. Thousands of bats were flying about among the ruins. They came swooping down from the vault, whispering, and I felt them all about me, flying low on silent wings. I shuddered at the thought of their brushing me and stood perfectly still. At that instant, between the slender balusters of a window through which the moon shone, I caught sight of the vast court in front of the temple. At its farther end, I had for the first time a clear view of the great block of Angkor, the massive structure of the five towers, more impressive than ever, perhaps, in this pallid light.

I felt overpowered. At my feet grass sprouted from the ruins. Timid startled creatures whirled overhead. Now and then I heard a distant confused sound of voices, soft chanting of priests, hour after hour repeating in unison their Pali psalms. Never had I seen so many stars in so bright a sky. And like a fallen star, a single light gleamed at the summit of the temple stairs, in the door of the sanctuary: the votive lamp of the Hindu money-lenders of Cholon, who make offering of this eternal flame to abandoned gods.

I rose very early, because once the sun climbs above the tree-tops sight-seeing becomes an ar-

duous task. Before the door of the bungalow the elephants were swinging their trunks and looking at the motor-car with evil little eyes. Were they mocking it because it did all their work now? A native in khaki was waiting beside the chauffeur. As I unfolded my map, since I did not yet know my directions, I asked him:

"Is it better to go first to Banteai Kedei or to Neak Pean?"

Ingenuously and very politely, clipping off each syllable, the Cambodian replied: "I do not know, sir. I am the new guide."

A charming race! All Cambodians are like this one, candid and without malice. I remember the story of a resident-superior who loved his good submissive Cambodians better than all other men. One day when he was stopping in a village, two typical natives, strong and well developed, approached him with bows.

"We come to beg justice against an Annamite who has beaten us," they said, prostrating themselves.

The resident looked at their broad shoulders and the strong muscles of their arms and could not hide his surprise. "Beaten you? I would like to have the man who had the courage to do so brought before me."

Soldiers immediately went off and soon returned with the guilty Annamite, one of those puny trouble-makers, with a dirty rag for a turban, to be seen wandering all over Cochin-China. The resident burst out laughing.

"What! You let yourself be done up by this sorry specimen?" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you thrash him?"

The older of the two Cambodians lifted his honest face and made answer, "Because this Annamite is a very bad, artful person."

All the gentleness and all the simplicity of the Cambodian race lies in that answer; its decadence also.

It is a relief not to meet any more of those weak coolies and those small women with the slanting eyes, but to see instead well built natives with straight eyes. Sometimes you are in doubt as you look at one whether it is a man or a woman. The two sexes look much alike—the same *sampot* of striped cloth folded round the lower part of the body, short hair brushed straight up. Every morning some twenty of them gather at the entrance to the paved causeway leading to Angkor Wat. They have a little market there, selling goodness knows what to nobody knows whom, and there they squat for hours on end behind their

baskets or in the shade of a small cart. They do not want anything; they are content with life.

"What are you doing there?" I asked one whom I had noticed contemplating the lily-filled moat all the morning.

Looking at my interpreter with a timid air, the sage replied, "I am amusing myself resting."

I repeat, a charming race!

On that particular morning, then, I set out to visit the ruins and asked to be taken to Prah Khan for no other reason than the pleasure of passing through Angkor Thom and seeing again the great Sivas of stone lifting their enigmatic faces from the somber pyramids of the Bayon. Little by little the ruins of the monuments have been snatched back from the jungle; the trees have been cut down, the lianas cleared away. But at Prah Khan the jungle still reigns. The silent war between plants and stones goes on under the immense canopy of the forest. Here you may experience the emotion of the first travelers of half a century ago, making discovery, ruin by ruin, of the marvelous city inextricably buried in vegetation. Trees, like animals, have learned how to fight. The banian, with its aërial roots, does not overthrow the ruins but envelops and strangles them; the silk-cotton-tree, more brutal,

AN OVERGROWN TERRACE IN ANGKOR THOM, ANCIENT KHMER CAPITAL

knocks down walls by the slow pressure of its growth.

Time has corroded the foundations of rust-colored laterite. On the worn frieze of the entablatures, the tracery of foliage is scarcely discernible. Strange, regular holes appear in the stones—the marks perhaps of the magic fingers of those who brought all the material to the celestial architect, Visvakarman, builder of Angkor. In the undergrowth lies the débris of bas-reliefs. You climb over great piles of tumbled stone, wrenching your ankles. When you think you are following a forest path, suddenly huge dead pillars, upholding one another, put a barrier across your way. Trees have sprung up even on the cornices and have thrust out snake-like roots between the disjoined stones. It is impossible to follow the galleries in which the carved walls are still upright; the roofs have fallen in on the statues and the columns, and everywhere is a chaotic clutter of stones, among which tall ferns conceal danger-traps. Who knows what poisonous creatures may swarm in these holes? Plants with leaves that cut like green sabers have grown all over the ancient, thick-columned temple. Cascades of foliage—brambles, lianas, clusters of wild flowers—fall from it. You climb over walls,

skirt towers, stumble up stairs, retrace your steps, lose your way completely.

There is no sunlight. The atmosphere is heavy with ground-vapors and damp swollen stems. Under the moss, mold the sculptured stones. How is one to recognize the monument or restore a colonnade in thought? The tropical forest has covered everything, effaced everything. You pause of necessity to contemplate the diadem-crowned *tevadas,* still intact in their niches, the *garudas,* supporting a pediment, a dancing god. But these inspire wonder less than the incredible entanglement of lianas and stones, a magic confusion in which trees stand on sandstone pedestals and columns have branches.

At Ta Prohm too I was to make astonishing discoveries of galleries invaded by ferns, pediments crowned with thorn-trees, porches obstructed with enormous blocks fallen from the high domes. The only dome now is the eternally green foliage, the dense canopy of interwoven lianas. The deep shade is restful. Spared the merciless light for a space, you can look about without black glasses. Here the galleries and verandas are like those everywhere else; there is the same underbrush, there are the same fallen ruins. Tree-trunks have grown through the walls; the leaves of

the silk-cotton-trees hide the sculptured dancers; and the lianas, like thousands of serpents, drop from the top of the towers.

Where is the sanctuary? Presumably it is that dark hole where one dares not venture without a torch. In all the temples of Angkor, blocks of sandstone have thus been piled up over acres of ground, walls have been raised, terraces lifted upon terraces. Then when you finally succeed in reaching the heart of the monument, you find a corridor so narrow that you can touch the two walls at the same time, a room with a low ceiling, so small that it cannot hold twenty men, a sanctuary with a dome so badly constructed that the weight of the stones alone would be enough to make it collapse. Artists of genius, the Khmers nevertheless did not know how to build.

At Ta Som a tree has grown through the monumental doorway and blocked it, and the roots have destroyed the walls. Yet on the four sides of the ruined tower, Siva smiles eternally, his mysterious countenance lost among the branches. Surely the god of destruction was lord of Angkor! At Neak Pean, in the middle of the great basin once filled with miraculous water in which the sick immersed themselves, towers a gigantic fig-tree, forever green. Between its knotty roots,

like contracted fingers, the secular *ficus* guards in its claws a little temple. One sees a tall Vishnu with broken hands; on other walls, gods standing erect, celestial dancers, prostrate worshipers. All this appears even more beautiful in the formidable embrace of the tree.

Ta Prohm, Ta Som, Neak Pean, the Bayon—it is enough merely to pronounce one of those harsh-syllabled names; immediately, in the memory of the returned traveler, pyramidal towers, a great basin, pillars, a sanctuary in ruins under a trellis of lianas, rise up. But what can they mean for others, for the reader who voyages only in dreams and enters the forest for the first time? How can he possibly follow this feverish tourist who is seeing again the places he discovered, flying from memory to memory, seeking to reconstruct a temple out of poor words, only to forget it and rush off to another he has recognized there among the branches! The reader vainly applies himself; he is like a blind person trying to keep up with a guide on horseback. It is of no use for him to go back, patiently pick up a phrase, distribute the objects in the order of the account. Like a castle of clouds, the whole structure vanishes as soon as it is built. The writer who does

A BUDDHA NEAR THE TEMPLE OF THE BAYON IN ANGKOR THOM

not spare you a single portico or tower, does not omit one bas-relief, and is unable to cross a bridge without demanding admiration for it, piles up so many details that the beautiful image finally disappears under all the pointing-rods. You can see it better without any knowledge of the facts, eyes closed, dreaming.

Of what use are descriptions? I wish to forget all the notes I took at the end of each day in the bungalow at Angkor, in my screened room like a fly-cage. Why make an effort to draw plans with words, paint façades with phrases?

Now that I have been away from Angkor six months, what do I recollect of those two little temples flanking the causeway of Angkor Wat, about which my note-book speaks to me? Nothing. But I have not forgotten the two priests in lemon-yellow robes who were walking on the terraces above, their robes gleaming in the sun; I see again the high, steep stairs, almost as vertical as walls; I recognize as a friend the vender who is leading the Siamese pilgrims from statue to statue, and I watch them paying their devotions, bobbing impartially before Vishnu and Buddha and planting their lighted incense-sticks in the cracks of the pedestals. A hundred feet above the causeway,

I watch a procession of multicolored women going away, led by a tall priest twirling an umbrella over his shoulder.

It is always visions like these that remain, as if to give life to the immobile beauty of things. Thanks to them, thanks to a shaft of light, a flight of wild ducks, a passing woman, a song, each traveler brings back from the same place a different memory. When I think of Pnom Bakheng, I forget the little sanctuary recently brought to light, with the miraculously preserved *tevadas* I duly admired at the time, but instead I find myself ascending the hill on a careful elephant, which tests each stone before putting its weight down. Above the immense sea of the forest, I admire the great basins, the five towers of Angkor Wat, the solid pile of the Bayon, while around me the Cambodian coolies laugh and chatter and disrespectfully toss stones down the slope.

At Banteai Kedei, whence the archæologists have driven away the forest so that now the ruins are displayed with the sorry nudity of a stone-yard, I no doubt admired with the others the false windows with their little columns, the small conical towers, the seated Buddha, but all this I have since forgotten. Banteai Kedai, in my memory, remains only as the temple of the bayaderes, the

abandoned palace of the Apsarases, dancers of the Hindu paradise. Why did the guide-books not mention them? Carved in the stone by tens, twenties, hundreds, they bring life to the dead walls. There beneath the porches and along the verandas, in the shadowy galleries and under the hard light of the sun falling through the crumbled domes, everywhere, they dance with supple arms and impassive faces, the upper part of the body rigid, just as they dance on the silver floor of the palace at Pnom-penh and as they dance on the borders of the celestial Ganges, for the diversion of Indra. In the trees surrounding the temple hundreds of parrakeets are chattering. In no other spot from Angkor Wat to Prah Khan are there so many of them. One might think they had come from the four corners of the forest to distract the little dead dancers in their solitude; until nightfall they never stop chattering as the dancers themselves chattered, in the old days, when the forest was a park and the ruins were a palace.

As I was leaving, I had but to stand still a moment beside the small basin filled with lotus flowers to see troops of gray monkeys skipping about among the trees. There are always bands of them there amusing themselves. If you clap

your hands suddenly, there is a comical flight through the branches. All the monkeys, making faces, rush off with shrill cries, flinging themselves upon the slender bridges made of lianas, each anxious to be the first to escape. I especially remember one female, perched on an oil-tree, with her little one hanging tightly to her stomach, gazing at me in surprise, her forehead puckered in perplexity. Do they all come trooping back as in other days, searching for the lichi-nuts and the mangosteens the little dancers used to throw them?

A Cambodian told me so, in his own language, while he was watching the monkeys as if he envied them. "Formerly," he explained, "monkeys spoke like men. Then men forced monkeys to work for them and made slaves out of them. One day the monkeys went on a strike. Intelligent but at the same time timid, they did not start a revolution; they simply pretended not to understand any more and ceased to talk as we do. Ever since then, they have lived in peace, doing no work, except to pluck their own dinners, and frisking about at pleasure. We should act like the monkeys, in order not to work or pay taxes, but we could never do it: we love laughing and singing too much!"

A COURT OF ANGKOR WAT, THE TWELFTH CENTURY BRAHMANIC TEMPLE BUILT BY THE MYSTERIOUS KHMERS

I still hear the guide's voice in my ear—a child reciting his lesson.

And now, for me, all this has become Banteai Kedei—countless dancing-girls, parrakeets calling, monkeys disporting themselves in the trees, and a Cambodian recounting fantasies as he watched one of the grimacing tribe.

I see the Bayon again in the early evening, with a moon already swinging high. It was at this hour that it bequeathed me my most profound memory. I do not stop, as in the morning, to admire the bas-reliefs that are very nearly caricatures in their realism, reminding me of the work of Breughel. Quickly I climb the dark stair. On the terrace, I encounter a whiff of hot air, as if out of a furnace—the heat of stones burned all day by the sun; even after nightfall they remain hot to the touch. Around me stretch vast open courts, towers and crests of stone, deserted esplanades. Bats squeak in the dark chapels and flit past, flying low. Slowly a sort of agony of marveling assails me. In whatever direction I turn, a god gazes back—forty-three towers, each with four human faces, a hundred and seventy-two Sivas mysteriously smiling! Long grass depends from their foreheads like hair. One holds between his lips a knot of lianas, which he appears

to be chewing softly. Some of the towers look as if they were about to collapse; light shows through the cracks in the stones of the faces. The night grows darker, and the charm becomes oppressive. One feels so little, so weak, so ephemeral. All these empty eyes, watching, all these wounded smiles! A sense of being made prisoner comes over me; I am become but a wavering ghost amid the thousands of ghosts crowding the terrace.

Suddenly a shaft of light spreads across the cleared place below; the chauffeur has turned on his headlights. Keeping close to the wall, I stumble hurriedly down, almost losing my footing on the worn steps.

It is a nocturnal vision also that I guard of Angkor Wat. One night we arranged for the dancers of Siem-reap to come and perform in front of the temple. After dinner fifty small torch-bearers came to fetch us at the *sala,* and we traversed the long causeway in a procession, followed by a group of Cambodians who had hastened over from their village. At their head was an idiot, called "king of Angkor," who spends his days among the ruins, crowned with a tiara of fresh flowers. It was in this fashion that we arrived at the outer gallery. A crowd of men and

A ROYAL DANCER OF CAMBODIA WEARING A SYMBOLIC MASK

women were already there with naked youngsters playing about underfoot; some of them had taken their places on the steps of the portico and along the balustrade of the bridge. Never before had the temple seemed so alive to me with all its old-time spirit.

The dancers made a charming entrance: Sita in a robe of gilded papier-mâché, Rama with little wings at his shoulders and face painted white like a moon-mask, the ugly demon Ravana—and all of them, big and little, crowned with tapering tiaras, the traditional *mukuta*. With impassive face, Rama danced barefoot, supple arms dislocating themselves, undulating like a *naga* beside the motionless body. Was the dancer not exactly like a temple *tevada?* Beginners, young girls absurdly tricked out in dragging robes, do their best to imitate her, but as the retired dancer who trains them clacks her boards to give the rhythm, they advance and retreat, always a little behindhand.

Ravana, the demon with ten faces, wanted to carry off the beautiful Sita, loved by Rama. When the two rivals of the legend defied each other, all the children present began to cry, as our children do at a Punch and Judy show.

The little torch-bearers, squatting on the stone

flags, made a magic circle of fire, sparks, and smoke round the dancers. The song of the frogs mingled with that of the cicadas. Night-birds flitted past, uttering strange cries. The whole of the pageant was not on the matting where Rama glided; it consisted of the happy crowd, this silent temple, this infinite sky in which the Southern Cross was hung, all that we looked upon with excited eyes because we were seeing it for the first time, and doubtless should never see it again.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG THE MOIS

WITH my last mouthful, I threw myself on the bed and slept, worn out. Even the animals of the forest have to take their siesta.

This mountainous road, joining the coast of Annam with the heart of the Moi country, has no equal. At dawn we had left Nha-trang, a bustling port disturbed by the whistle of trains. Soon after, we had passed through Ninh-hoa, with its crowded market. Then, at the end of twenty kilometers, suddenly everything had changed: instead of rice-fields, the forest; in place of the plain, ravines; in place of the yellow Annamites in long gowns, tall red-brown savages walking in single file, knives or spears over their shoulders, long pipes thrust in the knot of their hair, like a pin, or in their belts, cutlasswise. It was not merely the region that had shifted in character; I had passed into a totally new country, inhabited by a different people, belonging to a different age. (The name "Moi," from the Chinese character

man, meaning barbarous or savage, is the Annamese term for the primitive races inhabiting Indo-China.)

It was at the relay-post of Snoi-trinh that I had my first surprise. As my light car, especially adapted to this winding road, came to a stop, two Mois tumbled out of a hut resting on piles and brought water in a large section of bamboo to fill the radiator. They were naked except for a strip of cloth round the loins, and they had unresponsive faces, with teeth filed to the gums and lacquered black. Just the same, despite their savage appearance, they knew how to help the chauffeur change a tire.

A little later we overtook a caravan bringing back salt from the coast, and this was something quite different. These men ran up the bank with their baskets on their backs, scratching and tearing themselves on the branches, and their frightened little horses dashed off at full speed, scattering all their bags and baskets in the dust. Perhaps this was the first time they had ever seen a motor-car.

I was only at the beginning of my journey, and yet already I had the feeling of penetrating an unknown world, discovering virgin territory.

No *cainhas* any more, not a rickshaw, not a wayside shrine. Just a small stream to cross, and quite suddenly Annam had vanished. On one side lay the colony; on the other, primitive life.

In the rainy season, when there are washouts on the roads and bridges are down, it takes five days by elephant or ox-cart to reach Ban Methuot. It is to this fact that the Mois owe their freedom. A mountain has saved them.

I shall never forget that climb. An abyss yawns on the left-hand side of the road the whole way. Clinging to the flank of the mountain, the road makes wide detours, trying to find cuts where it can slip through. The wheels run along the edge of the void and knock pebbles down the slope at the turnings. The rocky stream-beds are dry, but the bamboo bridges sway as we pass over. Enormous blocks of granite overhang the road in menacing fashion. I look at the chauffeur with some anxiety. A driver clothed only in a loin-cloth, who drives with bare feet, does not inspire confidence.

Now we plunge into the forest. The gigantic banians are draped with mantles of lianas. Clusters of pink flowers adorn the branches. Once a wild peacock, trailing its marvelous tail on the

road in front of us, flew up heavily, so near that I might have touched it.

Now and then, between the trees, the summit of the Annamese range, some of its peaks attaining five or six thousand feet, is visible. The road twists, serpentines, grows tired of climbing, and perhaps for a minute or two, just long enough to catch its breath, runs along on the level. Already, up here, the air is better, and one can breathe more freely. Behind lies a green ocean of boughs, a vegetation so compact that it fills the ravines to the brim. It is a vast panorama of verdure, spotted with shadow, gleaming with mist. And all along the way the lianas are festooned like hangmen's ropes.

Every twenty kilometers a *tram,* or rest-house, has been built, and here travelers and hunters may pass the night, guarded by two militiamen, behind a high palisade of pointed stakes. More than once, when they have got wind of a pig or heard the barking of a dog, tigers have been known to jump the palisade at a bound. Mois are camping after a climb. Coupled together in pairs, their buffaloes are turned loose to graze. The women drop their burdens and prepare their food on a fire built over three stones. A young woman,

smoking a pipe and with her youngster dangling on her back like a load, sets about chopping wood. The men look on haughtily. Work of this sort is not for him who carries a spear.

The forest is less dense on the plateau; it gives place to big empty spaces, grassy hills, scrub, bamboo. Now and then a huge tree is to be seen, looking as if it had lost itself. We make a brief halt at the post of Mdrac—a French officer of militia intrenched behind palisades with twenty stalwart Moi soldiers—and then once more succeed hours of jungle, marsh, mountains, detours, forest. Here and there we catch sight of a barbaric tomb, a high mound of earth surmounted by an image roughly cut from a piece of wood. Occasionally a bamboo gate bars the road, to keep elephants from passing. At certain places a buffalo skull and stocks and shackles have been hung up; the neighboring village fears a cattle-pest, but believes itself safe behind these symbols —the shackles for hindrance, the stocks for punishment. Truly civilization has not yet passed this way.

Green wood-pigeons purl plaintively in the thickets. Jungle-cocks call to one another. I see great stags bounding away, the lyre of their

horns visible above the tangle of brush. This is a happy jungle. Shere Khan and Bagheera do not come out until night.

A few steps from the road a village is hidden. The long houses are raised on stilts, and you climb up by a notched bamboo. People above, pigs underneath! The women, who are pounding rice as they chew betel, have bead necklaces, ivory rings in their ears, bracelets up to the elbows. Many have bare breasts and wear nothing but a strip of cloth about the lower part of the body. The children, dressed in not so much as a string, are smoking pipes. A hunter goes off, carrying his crossbow and arrows. For all the world, these are the redskins of those childhood days of mine when I feverishly turned the pages of Fenimore Cooper.

Once more we go on. The road is bordered with impenetrable thickets. Everything is wild—these thorny lianas, these strange cries. The world seems infinitely remote. And then, unexpectedly, without warning, we are in Ban Methuot!

Most astonishing it is on coming out of the jungle suddenly to discover four straight avenues with impressive sidewalks and stone curbings and —preposterous, magnificent—electricity, street-

lights! At one side of the big grassy plaza, unadorned save for a thatched kiosk and two cages of bored monkeys, stretches the garrison of the native guard, fortified with a crenelated tower. On the opposite side, buried in foliage, lies the residency, a kind of modernized Moi house, with tiles and glass doors for its sole luxury. A few palms, a few huts, a fountain, the school, the prison—and then, four hundred yards farther on, the forest once more. Ban Methuot is the diagram of a town in the middle of the jungle. Sometimes at night the sentinel cries, "*Dok to nan!*—Halt there!" as he shoulders his rifle. It is only a tiger prowling along the sidewalk.

Never again shall I see anything so startling as this Moi country. It is impossible for any one who has once trodden the red ground of Da-rlac to forget it or the long palavering of the old men on the latticed terraces of the houses, the Djarais striking gongs like Easter bells, the fearless trackers pursuing the trails of wild beasts. Squaws, wigwams, calumet—it is the dream of my childhood that I am about to realize, even to the rifle slung over the shoulder, the enchanted forest of my old books. Dear twelfth-year books, I have found you once more, thrilling with life.

I must have been dreaming of all this when cries from the plaza waked me. Or perhaps it was the tom-tom; for the Moi whose duty it was to play it was a past master in the art and amused himself imitating the roll of thunder dying away, with blows in *decrescendo*. I came out of my siesta with a confused mind, only half taking in what was going on, but suddenly astonishment made me open my eyes wide.

"It is impossible—I am mistaken!"

Leaning on my elbow, I listened. The voice was coming nearer, a great brawling voice; doubt was no longer possible; it was an adjutant, drilling.

"One, two, one, two. Section, halt!"

Here was the familiar jargon of barracks. Curious to see this unlooked-for instructor at his work, I got up and went out to the steps. A platoon of Moi militiamen, in truth, shouldering arms, dressed in khaki and wearing flat caps, were going through their exercises on the plaza.

"But where is he?" I asked myself, looking for my petty officer.

No adjutant! Not a single white person in sight! And then, dumfounded, I discovered that the drill-commander was a Moi sergeant with bare feet like his comrades, a big devil of a fellow who,

without knowing French, made his recruits pivot about by shouting words at them which he himself did not in the least understand. Nor did he ever make a mistake, and even the accent was perfect with which he bawled out his orders: "Shoulder arms! Right! Forward, march!" One of our reënlisted men could have found nothing to criticize. In the ten years or so that he had been bellowing like this, he had ended by picking up even the intonation, to the classic snap of the jaw, and when the "grandfather" was not there —the *ay,* as they call the white man—he proudly commanded the maneuvers in French, to win admiration for himself. And I have not the least doubt he called those who did not march straight "savages." Never did I see a more convincing drill-sergeant than that one.

With no thought of taking the trouble to dress, I walked down to the plaza just as I was, in pajamas and with my helmet on my head; and this unusual outfit caused no surprise. One might just as well turn out as a horse-guard or a page of Henry III; these naked primitives would not be astonished. They do not know the difference.

From now on, I was to experience a succession of surprises. A Moi goes by with an enormous haunch of venison on his shoulder. I call to him,

and he stops. With the aid of the Annamite secretary who acts as interpreter, I conclude the purchase: twenty-five pounds of venison for twenty cents!

I see a courier starting off with letters in a bag and in his hand a curious kind of stick. I look at him in fascination. At the end of the stick are fastened a coal, a feather, and a pepper. What are these for? They indicate, it seems, that the letters are urgent, and that the couriers who relay the bag and stick to the coast should make haste—as if they were walking over burning coals, flying like a bird, running as if they had pepper on the tongue.

In absurd contrast, there is the telegraph-station, not three paces away; on the one hand Morse, on the other "The Last of the Mohicans"!

As I study and think about these poor Mois, I am sorry for them. How is a backward race like this to adapt itself to our civilization? How make a leap from barbarism to the rights of man, from prehistoric traditions to wireless? Can it possibly be accomplished?

The Annamites have associated with Europeans for several centuries, and before our arrival they had a civilization of their own. They have been able to progress. But the Mois have

never had any contact with civilized people, yellow or white. Having taken refuge in the forests of the high plateaus, they have lived there for centuries, exactly as their ancestors must have lived who came from Malaysia in unknown times. They hunt, breed buffaloes, transplant mountain-rice in little clearings. They have no writing and hence no history; no religion but fear; not a glimmer of knowledge. They know absolutely nothing. On the maps of Indo-China, as recently as twenty-five years ago, the Moi territory was left blank. One read simply: "Waste land. Savages." The Annamites even held that they were cannibals. Such are the primitive folk suddenly assaulted by the twentieth century, in one breath presented with electricity, the telegraph, motor-cars, airplanes, motion-pictures.

There are those who express astonishment that these primitive people remain hostile, fearful, timid. I, on the contrary, marveled that they were not more so. Imagine Attila at the telephone, Clovis facing a motor-car. Such is the disconcerting spectacle of the high plateaus. I have seen some of these same savages, dressed in nothing but a dirty rag, start off into the forest with their tools on their shoulders to mend the telegraph-line, when elephants had pulled up the

poles. I have seen my naked chauffeur solder with a torch the perforated float of the carbureter. I have seen a Moi woman, with ears stretched out by the weight of her ear-rings, call to the telephone an elephant-hunter of Ban-don, who must have shouted like a deaf man into a wooden trumpet. And I have seen a wild creature, scarcely out of the forest, oiling her sewing-machine and then licking the oil-can.

They do not understand as yet, they cannot understand. Nevertheless they are already adapting themselves. The question is, will they be given enough time? They have been made to jump twenty centuries. As backward as the Indians of Christopher Columbus, only a short while ago they were exchanging elephant's tusks and precious deer-horn for necklaces of colored beads; they were prostrating themselves in front of a tinder-box; a woman gave herself for an empty bottle. There are still thousands of them who have never set eyes on a white man and who never even heard of France. They do not know their age; they cannot reckon the time; they think the earth is circular and flat like a pancake; they can count only with the aid of their ten fingers or knots in a string; they shout and beat their gongs on a night of eclipse, so that the sun may re-

A GROUP OF MOIS, ONE OF THE PRIMITIVE TRIBES INHABITING THE INTERIOR OF FRENCH INDO-CHINA

frain from doing violence to the moon. And it is among these utterly untutored beings that civilization is now on the point of hurling itself, attracted by the riches of their red land.

"They do not cultivate their land. They do not do any prospecting for minerals or oil. Let us take everything!" Spoliation? Not at all: improvement, colonial expansion, civilization! But what do they actually know of this same civilization? Nothing but taxes, forced labor, the militia. And now another development threatens them, in the form of plantations and mines.

In these forests in which they live and have their villages and rice-patches, concessions of eighty and ninety thousand acres are to be handed over for exploitation. If they do not join the unsubjugated Sedangs to the north or the rebellious Stiengs and Ruongs of the open forest land to the south, no choice will be left them save to become coolies and slaves while they wait for misery, sickness, and alcohol to bring about their ultimate extermination.

France cried out in indignation when the Americans drove the Indians from the prairies and wiped out their race. To-day it is the plateaus of southern Annam toward which we ought to look. These are inhabited by a population of more than

three hundred thousand—red-turbaned Djarais, Bahnars with copper bracelets, Radés in curious short jackets, Mnongs dressed in bark—three hundred thousand, at least, in imminent danger of being enslaved without having the slightest opportunity to be brought up to our level.

"Savages!" say the contractors who have undertaken to make them into human cattle. Oh, no, not savages! Ask any one of the residents who have had anything to do with them. I think I still see old Ma-ngay, questioning an arrogant Annamite who had insulted the Moi guards at a certain post and treated them like monkeys and swine.

"Why did you insult them like that?" asked the old man, in his rough Radé tongue. "You are very proud. Are we not all alike? *Do we not eat the same rice?*" And he looked hard at the Annamite while he played with the tin necklace on his naked chest. Since then whenever I see men envying one another and fighting and hating, the remark of the old Moi invariably comes back to me: "Do we not eat the same rice?"

Is Khunjonob, chief of the tribe of elephant-hunters, nothing but a savage—he who hurled at the governor-general the proud challenge:

"Send your spirit beyond the great mountains,

behind which the sun disappears. It is there that we live, the Radés, the Pihs, and the Mnongs. We belong to neither Annam nor Laos nor Siam. We stand alone; we are to ourselves alone. The land in which we live is the land given us by the Lord of Heaven."

Such are the men who are to be made into a race of coolies!

To assume that they can at once play their part in modern life spells their destruction. In Cochin-China and in southern Annam many of their provinces have already been colonized, with the result that in ten years the number of Mois has shrunk by one half. The Annamites arrive, establish themselves, multiply; the Mois die out.

Still an effort has been made to save them. Residents, deputies, missionaries, majors, and civil doctors have climbed the mountain trails to vaccinate tribes that were being decimated by smallpox. Often the poor terrified wretches intrenched themselves in their villages, desperately intent on preventing the whites from getting at them. Slave-merchants have been ruthlessly driven off. Justice has been enforced. Schools have been opened. Makeshift dispensaries have been set up and medicines distributed to these timid wild folk. Without bombs or rifles, the

unsubjugated villages have been pacified. The mission of Kon-tum converted whole populations. Wishing to protect them against themselves, one resident-superior issued a decree that since the Mois were not yet responsible, they should not alienate their own lands.

But to-day the danger is greater than ever. The greed of money is the principal menace to the Mois. Once the frontiers of Kon-tum and Da-rlac are opened to colonial finance, these people are done for. Only a few dull laborers, such as one encounters working in groups on the plantations of Cochin-China, will survive. The decision rests with us whether they have the right to their existence or whether commercial development is to override everything else. A signature at the bottom of a sheet of paper, and all will be settled.

"I-hugne!"

Scarcely have I called his name before my Radé servant appears, with his eternal towel. He has large negroid eyes, enormous hands, a kind look of worried devotion.

Dictionary in hand, I search for what I am to ask him, meanwhile trying to express it by gestures, but I-hugne does not see me. Frowning, alert, with the air of a hunter lying in wait, he

scans the walls and the ceiling and peers at the cracks in the floor. There it is! He sees it! Holding his breath, he noiselessly steals up on bare feet. Whack! He crushes something under his towel—a cockroach, a big fly, a centipede. And I-hugne triumphantly comes to display beneath my eyes the mashed insect.

I can call him twenty times during the morning, and invariably we go through the same performance. The day I arrived I summoned him to my room to help me get rid of a spider that I could not catch, a hairy thing as large as my hand, which incidentally he drove with great skill right into my bed. Since then I-hugne cannot imagine that I might call him for anything except to drive away some creature. If I shake my head in despair and wave my hand in every conceivable way to make him understand that he is mistaken, he looks at me, stupefied, for a moment, mouth open; then catching sight of another, still larger insect —there are plenty in this residence built of tree-trunks—his face lights up, and he falls upon the new prey.

"Him plenty stupid," says the cook, the only Annamite of the establishment, who comes to my aid.

Stupid, yes; I believe that I-hugne is excessively

stupid. But so devoted, so anxious to do well! One evening at the end of the dinner we made the mistake of asking for oranges when there were none. I-hugne, utterly at a loss, kept repeating, "*Boh krue,*" while he stared at the ceiling as if oranges might grow there. Then suddenly his face broke into a broad smile. He shook his towel in token of joy and disappeared on the run. Had he remembered some hidden store? Was he going to offer us papayas or custard-apples instead? Not at all. I-hugne simply did not show up again. An hour later he had not yet reappeared, and we went to bed.

"Where the devil did he vanish to?" I asked myself as I tucked in my mosquito-net.

We did not learn until the next day. Sure of finding oranges in his own village, I-hugne had departed on horseback, his rifle thrown across the saddle, and he had trotted for three good hours through the forest, had startled the inhabitants of the village by shouting that the *ays* insisted on having oranges at once, had made them pick all that were ripe, and at dawn had made a triumphant return to Ban-Methuot at the head of half a dozen worn-out Mois, carrying small baskets on their backs full of *boh krue.* I-hugne never could understand why every one unanimously called

him a fool—the word is given as *mluk,* on page 67 of my Radé dictionary.

Fortunately not all these folk are as simple as my fly-catcher. Certainly the greater number look upon our European inventions as so many miracles: "It is the *yang,*" they say, just as the Annamites would say, "It is the *makoui,*" or the Bretons, "It is the devil." But there are some who are intelligent enough to think and find their own explanations of things.

"What makes your automobile go?" I asked my chauffeur one day.

"Fire."

"Doesn't that surprise you?"

He stood nonchalantly before me, quite naked, with an English key in his hand.

"No," he answered. Then looking into my face, he asked, "But why doesn't it set fire to the car?" That was all he failed to understand.

When for the first time a phonograph was turned on in the reception-room of the residency, where an athlete and a Diana in imitation bronze supposedly represent the ancestors of the Radés, the Mois present were nonplussed for a while. They asked one another where this voice and this music were coming from and talked in loud tones and gesticulated, in their usual man-

ner. When the resident had granted permission, they approached with curiosity, examined the strange box, looked under the table, lifted the tasseled table-cover, and pushed open the door of the next room. The shrewdest, without saying anything, slipped down to see if somebody was not hidden under the house. But convinced that there was no trick and that it was the machine that sang, they ceased to be astonished and listened with the greatest simplicity, squatting all around and taking care, like well trained savages, to spit their betel-juice only through the cracks of the flooring.

"The *yang!*—A spirit!" the more simple-minded said to themselves. And the more advanced put it down simply as "Another of the white man's things." If we brought down the moon by pulling a rope, they would not be especially surprised. They believe us capable of anything.

When the first airplane flight between the coast and Da-rlac was planned, the resident took the precaution to warn all the villages, so that the inhabitants, panic-stricken, might not run away or begin shooting at the immense bird. But the Mois—who would have believed it?—were not particularly frightened. No doubt when they

heard the roar in the sky, they beat tom-toms and gongs; and when the biplane, with motor cut off, darted toward the landing-ground that had been made ready, the men and women there plunged into the thickets, in the belief that the bird with the badge was about to pounce on them. But their terror did not last long. As soon as the plane was down, the two officers climbed out, and at the first sign of the *ays* the Radés rushed forward. The militiamen were actually proud to push the air-plain to the hangar and to stand guard around it.

"Machine of the white man," they said once again.

That was enough of an explanation for them. The poor Moi has but one invisible *yang,* which only the sorcerer can see, but the Frenchman has innumerable *yangs*—his compass, his watch, his flash-light, his revolver. The credulous Moi admires them all just as long as they remain novelties to him.

One day I was coming down from Dalat on foot, following the line of the future railway. I stopped half-way down, at an engineer's, for lunch. The place was a kind of wood-chopper's hut, set in a magnificent landscape of torrential streams and pines. A crowd of Moi coolies was about, no longer the free hunters of Da-rlac but

poor dull creatures, driven by hunger into the lumber-camps and then driven away again by the veriest nothings—a fright, a superstition, an ill omen of some sort.

While these Mois were watching us eat with great curiosity, an absurd idea popped into my head. I took a piece of ice, precious ice carried with extreme difficulty into this wilderness, and I went up to one of the Mois and pressed the cold object against his forehead. He stepped back, astonished, so suddenly that all the others burst out laughing. I touched the ice to his chest, his arms, his cheek, and then, having made him open his mouth, I put it in. This time he rolled wild eyes and quickly spit the strange stone into his hand, jabbering I know not what. All the others crowded round him, fingers stretched out. They all wanted to touch this marvelous thing whose contact made them jump, and they passed the ice from hand to hand with loud exclamations of surprise. Naturally the ice was melting in the process, and presently the last coolie had nothing in his palm but a wet spot. None of them could understand; each examined the hands of the others suspiciously. They spread their fingers, searched in sashes, in the grass. No, it had vanished.

And they all looked at me, speechless, fearing perhaps that I might accuse them of theft.

It is probable that back in their villages these Mois afterward told the story of the mysterious cold stone that disappeared all at once, but surely some Annamite was on hand to explain, while he made fun of them, that the miracle was nothing but *nuoc da,* the "stone of water," indispensable to the people from Europe. Thus little by little our *yangs* are losing their prestige.

When I-hugne, specially detailed from the militia, came to the residency, he regarded the clock as something prodigious; now he dusts it without a thought, and he might perhaps be capable of winding it, if simple prudence and the absence of a clock-maker did not counsel the "grandfather" to be wary. For my part I would willingly do without a clock and be content with the Moi hours. They have charming names.

"I-hugne, what time is it?" asks the resident.

I-hugne, who is setting the table, answers without consulting the timepiece, "*Iang hroe dang;* the vertical sun"—in other words, noon.

There are "first cockcrow," "break of day," "sun above the trees," "sun up to the rafters." Others are still more graphic, as "sun in line with

water-bottle.'' Does one not verily see the sun in line with the gourd, tilted by the traveler as he pours the water straight into his mouth? This is ten o'clock in the morning. And the setting sun ''shoots its darts at the hind quarters of the roebuck''; and nine o'clock in the evening is the ''moment when children fall asleep.'' Is not the Moi way of counting time as good as a clock, even one that strikes the half-hours?

Civilization, alas, is going to destroy this kind of thing! But fortunately we shall have other surprises. For instance I was at Ban Methuot on the occasion when the resident showed the Radés their first motion-picture. It was an astonishing spectacle. Several hundred men and women were jammed into the big shed where on ordinary evenings the dancing-girls and gong-players perform. There was an inconceivable confusion of bare skin, oiled hair, arms encircled with copper coils, striped loin-cloths, multicolored turbans, breasts only partly hidden under scarfs. None of the ragged coats, none of the incongruous garments seen everywhere else: the *ay* has put his foot down. A few fashionable damsels, however, slipped in, wearing little jackets of apple-green or orange that set the teeth on edge. But by way of a happy compensation, they were slobbering betel

and had bare feet. Dangling legs of children, perched here and there, shrieks, laughter, and the all-pervasive smell of grease!

Suddenly the lights went out, and the Mois set up a noisy chattering. It had been explained to them that the entertainment, instead of taking place on the stage, would be presented that night at the opposite end of the hall, on the white sheet hanging from the rafters, but evidently they did not believe this; for in the dark we could distinguish eyes staring at us and open mouths.

Then the film began to flicker on the screen. There was a sudden outcry. All turned to look, and for one instant the silence was absolute. They gazed, open-mouthed, without comprehending. Then the picture grew clear, and all at once, amazed, they recognized on the sheet men and horses walking. They set up a louder hullabaloo than ever, jumped up and down, and belabored one another with cracks that resounded on their bare skins. It was a comic uproar of laughter broken loose and a wild clamor, the bellowing of buffaloes. Nevertheless, squatting before us, there were some who remained silent and looked on idiotically, as if they had seen nothing and did not have the slightest understanding of what all the noise was about.

The film showed an artillery detachment at Saloniki, and since none of the Mois, not even the oldest of the militiamen, had ever seen cannons, they could not possibly imagine the meaning of these trunks of trees, being dragged along on two wheels. The following film was equally meaningless, and they were not able even to make out what the scenes were. Already they were exclaiming less, but, like children, they were simply amused to see moving shadows.

Then it was that Charlot appeared. Yes, precisely, Charlie Chaplin, at Ban Methuot, on the high red table-lands, in the heart of the forests where the Mnong hunters track down elephants. Not one of the Mois grasped what was happening on the screen, and we ourselves followed the action with difficulty, since the reel was badly worn, but there were pursuits, battles, pieces of furniture that began to spin about like tops. All at once the crowd of Radés broke out into crazy expressions of joy, deafening us with their yells and outbursts of laughter.

Charlie's usual pleasantries, which make us laugh so, his baggy trousers, his curly hair, his little hat, his way of walking, all this left them unmoved. They said to themselves once again, "White people's things." No doubt they imag-

ined that it was our custom to rig ourselves out like that and to stop somebody in the street by gripping a foot with the hook of a walking-stick. They did not laugh at incidents like this. But the minute the blond young heroine appeared in the foreground, weeping glycerin tears over Charlie's misfortunes, a loud explosion of laughter nearly bent them double, made them gesticulate and leap about and utter piercing cries.

Assuredly that young American girl had a genius for comedy of which she was totally unaware. It was enough for her merely to show herself, for joy to reign supreme. Why? We never could find the reason.

"It is the woman," evasively answered the school-boys, the chauffeurs, and the secretary, when I questioned them. Radium and Robinet themselves, clever as they are, could not tell me anything more. I do not know to this day whether it was the blond hair of the American girl or her big face in the close-ups or her tears, which made them choke with laughter until they upset the benches.

In the evenings, I often go to the spring where the women come to draw water and to bathe. They are less well proportioned than the men with

their long, sinewy thighs. Their legs are a little too short, perhaps, but they have splendid shoulders and firm full breasts, not much disfigured by large black nipples. Among them, the young girls are to be distinguished by their more slender limbs and their little, almost triangular breasts, funnily pointed. They are so skilful about undressing and dressing that one cannot catch a glimpse of what their modesty wishes to hide.

They laugh, chatter, splash in the water, and troop back again, baskets full of glistening calabashes. In spite of the slightly flattened noses and thick lips, their faces, with long black eyes, terra-cotta coloring, and a crown of glossy hair, possess a certain kind of charm. The women are vain. In their ears they hang rings, colored stones, or cylinders of ivory, and as time passes the lobe, dragged down by these heavy ornaments, lengthens until it finally reaches the shoulders. Sometimes in old women this long fleshy string ends by breaking, but the skin has become so dry that it does not even bleed. The Mois are not in the least disturbed; they tie the two pieces together, as they would knot a cord, and put back their ear-rings. One might find them really handsome, if it were not for the horrible mouths, always red with betel, disclosing filed and black-

MOI WOMEN SQUATTING IN CUSTOMARY FASHION, BACK-BASKETS REMOVED, TO PARTAKE OF FOOD

ened teeth. Is it in order to make themselves appear attractive that both men and women thus embellish themselves? I verily believe so.

"We do not wish to have teeth like those of dogs," they say, looking at our white ones.

And as soon as they reach the age of courtship, at thirteen or fourteen, they all voluntarily undergo the horrible operation that I saw performed. The patient lies on his back, his head between the legs of the bone-setter, a kind of wooden bit thrust into his mouth, an assistant seated on his stomach to prevent him from moving. One would think one's self looking on at torture. With a stone, the operator begins by breaking the upper teeth; then he files the rough edges, chips here, polishes there, and, after exhausting labor lasting all day, leaves his victim bleeding, his gums torn, his lips raw and cut, unable for a fortnight to eat anything but liquids. This is not the end. The sufferer is given a bit of stone, and whenever he has a moment to spare, in the evenings or while he is walking about, he goes on filing down his own stumps until they are even. When this is accomplished, the lower teeth are treated in the same way; among certain tribes, as a special refinement, these are cut in the shape of saw-teeth. Nothing now remains but the black-

ening process, for which the heated juice of a small tree, gathered on the blade of a knife, serves the desired end. The young Moi girl is at last ready for love!

For they do love! Like brutes, at times, or like beasts. But with tenderness too, and with soul. And their only art is the art of love-songs.

I was always delighted when the girl wearing a black scarf knotted in two loops, like an Alsatian peasant's head-dress, and the thin Radé who was invariably wrapped in a dark blanket, came to squat on the veranda of our wooden house to sing the old Moi songs for me. From time to time they stopped to spit forth their betel and then went on with the song again, always with the prelude of a long cry. The music is strange, limited to a few tones only. It is accented by sonorous words, and each completed thought ends in a series of long-drawn-out, half-smothered, harsh sounds—a chant, as much as a song.

With the cordial and friendly assistance of my host, L. Sabatier, French resident at Da-rlac, who has consecrated his life to the betterment of the condition of the Mois, I translated some of these songs, word for word. The following is a song for two voices; always a man and a woman:

O graceful young girl, young girl light of foot, whose mouth speaketh seductive words,
O young girl, let us contend in amorous discourse;
Let us exchange the token bracelets: thou shalt give me thine and I will give mine to thee.

I desire thee, if thou art slim as the stem of the bamboo,
If thy hands and thy feet move as quickly at thy work as the trenchant knife.
Then shall I give thee my heart, then shall I mingle my breath with thine.
Then, be thou assured, shall I love thee.

All my treasure, the turban of black silk falling on my shoulder, the turban a fathom long binding my forehead, all the garments I possess—of little concern is it to me if I lose them all, so thou wilt have me.

I fear that once the rice is eaten, thou wilt spurn the pot, that as soon as the vegetables are consumed, thou wilt throw away the bowl.
I fear that if I become big with child, thou wilt abandon me; I fear that thou wilt then flee far away, to the country of the Bih or to the bark-clad Mnongs.

Why should I discard my knife? Why should I lay aside my lance? Why should I abandon my wife in the most beautiful days of my youth?

Thus, like magnificent bronzes, impassive, responding in dialogue, sang the tall, naked Djarais, the most intelligent and proud of all the Mois. Sometimes closing their lips, they allowed only a plaintive wail to escape. Sometimes their full-throated cries were like clanging gongs:

O young girl, young girl so beautiful,
O young girl, I desire to live with thee!
O young girl, wilt thou have me?
We two will live together.

I go to the east, toward Black Mountain;
I go to the west, toward Kling Mountain;
I go from east to west, searching the young girl.

In thy house are many people; we might be discovered.
But when thou goest for water, I shall wait for thee on the bank.
If I am there before thee, I shall wait for thee.
If thou art there before me, wilt thou wait for me,
O young girl whom I desire?

The trysts at the fountain, young girls in the hazel-copse, nuptials—however different people may be, they are always alike when it comes to love!

Shall I acknowledge that it was in Da-rlac that I came to know the most fiery of all lovers?

When I think of that barbaric passion, the hottest of our European love-affairs strike me as attenuated and our vows as affected.

The young Radé of whom I am thinking was the most ill favored man in his village—shorter than the other men, his legs slightly crooked, his face showing the traces of smallpox. Ugly as he was, however, he had fallen in love with the most beautiful girl of Ban Methuot, a coquette who never went out without a white scarf bound round her breast, a great tin collar about her neck, and her hair dressed in the style of the red lands, with a little tuft above the coil.

The first time he accosted the girl at the fountain, she sharply repulsed him. The lover nevertheless returned on the following day. Before her companions, the Moi girl set about mocking him, laughed at his deformity, and turned him into ridicule—resembling in this respect all other girls in the world—and the young savages joined her in screaming at him, each in turn finding a crueler jest to hurl than the last.

Too deeply smitten to be proud, the Radé came back to the attack in spite of everything, offering bracelets and copper beads. He told the girl's parents that he wanted her, saying, "I desire that our feet receive the sacrificial water." And he

pressed and implored the mocking Moi girl to exchange bracelets.

Finally one day, to get rid of him and to make her companions laugh, she said to him, "I will be thy wife when thou bringest me a nest of red ants in thy mouth."

For the benefit of the reader not acquainted with red ants, let me explain that these are frightful creatures, five times as large as those of our climate, with a sting that hurts as much as a wasp's. When a column of these insects arrives, nothing can stop them. You have to get out of your house, and, if you leave a horse staked out in their path, you will find nothing but a skeleton the next day.

Well, the Moi disappeared in the wood, climbed a tree, and got hold of a nest, swarming with red ants, in a large leaf. Before the astounded Radés, he brought this back between his teeth, his face terrible to look at, with swollen cheeks and eyes closed; for he was stung even down inside his throat. By a miracle, this barbaric Amadis did not die, and the girl married him. And now, whenever I am invited to cite a proof of love, I have a vision of that Radé with the crooked legs, married to the woman of the beautiful breasts.

Two or three times during the week, we administer justice. (How queer these words will sound when, later on, I relate my memories to my grandchildren!) To be sure, I do not render decisions, but on the days when hearings are held, seated at my customary place before a rustic table, I have the air of playing clerk of the court, and the squatting Mois watch me with fear.

The veranda of the residency is the court-house. The judges are three Radé chiefs, and the crowd of the accused and the complainants overflow the stairs with a motley confusion of striped cloths, naked thighs, bracelets, turbans, lances, and glistening eyes, while on the sun-beaten square elephants and prisoners with their necks in stocks pass by.

The law of the Radé is not incorporated in a code; it is disseminated in innumerable sayings that have been handed down for ages, and the ancients recite these in guttural tones, while they seem to beat out the measure with lifted hand. Elsewhere I have known law; here I had a glimpse of equity. And if I am able now to imagine Solomon on his throne or St. Louis under his oak, it is neither to the Bible nor to Joinville that I am indebted: it is to those three savages with copper bracelets and tin necklaces.

Of the three, I liked best the oldest, Ma-ngay, who presided. Crippled by rheumatism, he used to arrive on a horse so small that his feet dragged in the dust. When he walked, he had to lean on a cane, one hand resting on his lame thigh; but though he was so bent with his ailment, he still made a fine figure. He used to seat himself in a funny manner in his wicker arm-chair, with one foot tucked under him in such a way that he could rest his chin on his knee, and it was in this posture that he followed the cases, his face set, his wrinkled cheek always distended with a quid of betel.

Y-thuop, the youngest, was also the most modern. He arrived on a bicycle, wearing a bath-towel knotted round his waist in lieu of a sash. Since he was a personage, however, he never showed himself without his little red-braided jacket with its copper buttons, which he wore wide open on his athletic chest.

Ma-bli, the third judge, did not look severe, though he had a wily eye. He was always draped in a blanket, as if cold, and he smiled incessantly, even when insisting that the culprit be hanged.

It was Y-thuop who led the debates. He assumed important airs, yawned, stretched himself, reknotted his towel, interrupted the witnesses.

Less experienced than Ma-ngay, no doubt, less spiteful than Ma-bli—but with more intelligence in his look and more authority in his voice, qualities needed to bring light into these law-cases!

At times all the inhabitants of a village came to testify, half on one side, half on the other, and hardly had the plaintiff uttered two words before the row would begin. The old women stopped hunting lice, the men shoved back their betel-quid, the plump babies were thrown down among their wrappings and had to stop nursing, and all of them bellowed, threatened, and insulted one another, so that in the frightful din it was quite impossible to make out what the trouble was about. But Y-thuop was equal to the occasion. Ten times he began the examination anew, summoned one, sent back another, laughed boisterously at the howling; and then suddenly the months of prison and the fines fell, also sacrifices, consisting of a pig or a buffalo to be slaughtered. As soon as sentence was pronounced, bracelets were exchanged and the pacified villagers returned home in Indian file, their baskets on their backs.

Now and then it was a deceived wife or husband who came to demand that punishment be meted out to the guilty. Yes, even here! Adultery, like food and drink, is to be found in every

country. Ma-bli, inert until now, suddenly came to life under his blanket. For once interrupting Y-thuop, who was on the point of asking the Moi woman whether or not she confessed to the fault, Ma-bli slyly questioned:

"How many times did you betray your husband?"

The woman fell into the snare. Instead of denying, she answered, thinking she would be pardoned, "Once."

"You shall be punished!" Ma-bli exclaimed triumphantly.

And Y-thuop, falling back in his chair, laughed heartily.

Decisions were cast primarily in relation to tangled questions of property division, sales and inheritance, and in these disputes about money, the Mois displayed the same animosity that our French peasants show. How was it possible ever to know who was right? No papers, no contracts, no receipts exist, because these people cannot write. Nothing but a bracelet, and unreliable witnesses who give one another the lie, are forthcoming by way of proof. How have they been able even so much as to record the things they are disputing about? By making notches in a bamboo or tying knots in a string. "He lies!"

screamed a simple-minded Moi from whom an Annamite was claiming fifty piasters. "I have only twenty-seven knots in my string." And he waved it, sure of his claims, like a provincial litigant with his stamped documents.

These discussions sometimes turned into quarrels, and Y-thuop, in spite of his threats and his scowls, could not settle matters. Who was to be the heir? There is no civil code. Would the elephants and the jars go to this family or to that one? The cohorts shouted on behalf of their clans. Old harpies added their screeching to the tumult. Men surreptitiously dealt blows to one another, and the militiaman on duty kept dropping the butt of his gun on the bare feet of the worst offenders.

It was then that old Ma-ngay would emerge from his silence. All at once he would stretch out his arm, fingers spread wide, and with an altered voice and measured words he would begin to recite. All grew quiet. They understood. It was the *Bidoué,* the ancestral law:

Copper bowl in hawk's nest, copper bowl in *kney's* nest.

Baskets, wallets, small objects—you should keep them, you, eldest sister.

Calabashes, ash-baskets, sharpening-stones, wood for

utensils, dyeing-brushes, brushes of wild boars' bristles —you, eldest sister, should keep them.

Precious pots hidden in the swamps, gongs, jars, pretty articles, valuable articles—to you, eldest sister.

Riding-horses, elephants, slaves, buffaloes, pigs, chickens—to you alone, eldest sister.

Servants and slaves, the young girls and the young men, shall labor with you in the field, eldest sister.

The bananas, the yams, the rice you shall divide with your sisters, eldest sister. The entrails of the buffalo and the flesh of pigs you shall divide into equal parts, eldest sister. Small pots, small calabashes, objects worth one *dah,* divide among your sisters, you, eldest sister.

Without dispute, with no outcry. Do not leave one another. Do not separate. Live together. Otherwise, small or great, weak or strong, will be lost. Give aid to one another . . .

He declaimed this in a strange broken voice, which made the ringing words still harsher, and his two judges, nodding their heads, murmured with him, scarcely moving their lips, like worshipers following the mass. The others listened in silence, recognizing the familiar phrases. It seemed to them that their ancestors were judging them.

"Listen to me; I am the past!" old Ma-ngay occasionally exclaimed above the clamoring voices, extending his arm weighted with bracelets. And he possessed such barbaric nobility that all present were silenced, overawed.

For every case, every delinquency, the old hunter brought up from the depths of his memory a fragment of *Bidoué,* and his hand with the crippled fingers mysteriously beat out its rhythm. It was no longer the subtle Y-thuop who led the controversy; it was Ma-ngay, haughty, austere.

"I speak straight, and thou wilt not listen! I utter the truth, and thou hearest me not!" Unconsciously he used the same figurative language as that of the ancestral law. "Thou didst take the gongs and beat them until they cracked. Thou didst swing the firebrand like a crazy man, without fearing to set fire to thy village."

He alone, this survivor of old Da-rlac, can speak in the name of the past. He sees that everything is disintegrating. Customs are forgotten. The children dispute feverishly for the inheritances established by centuries of matriarchy. The jars are scattered, the elephants sold; the daughters and the sons take themselves off, each one for himself.

Lost, uncle and nephew; lost, grandmother and grandchildren; lost, those that were here and those that were there.

There is none who dares occupy the land. . . .

Yet there are those who dare, at present. And the traffickers on their way will not be judged by old Ma-ngay.

The gesture of his extended hand always preceded his speech. His harsh look condemned, before the words of the law. If a man was brought to him who had spoken evil of the people of his village and spread ugly rumors, instantly he would recall the anathema of the *Bidoué:*

His mouth calumniates. He slanders with long teeth.

Deceiving bamboo—one thinks him smooth, and he cuts. He wickedly seeks to cheat the world. He slips a liana round the neck of peaceable folk. He puts hindrances in the way of good men.

False cotton-plant with worm-eaten heart, jar that leaks—he wishes us to believe that smallpox and *piang* menace the village.

He defiles the honorable girl, offends mother and child.

This is evil, and there is an account against him.

He had finished. Y-thuop proposed a penalty. Ma-bli smilingly asked for a severer one.

But Ma-ngay, chewing his betel, had nothing more to say and impassively contemplated the prisoner, upon whose neck the stocks were clapped by a militiaman. He was able to judge everything without opening any code-book, without citing any rules. Nothing but florid, picturesque oratory.

Seated at my table among these squatting Mois, I entered into their stories. I became passionately interested in the succession of Ma-dun, in the abduction of H'Ya, also called the Precious One. I liked their cries. I watched their expressions. I waited for Ma-ngay to lift his hand.

One day they brought us a youngster not more than twelve years old, whose wide-awake little head rose out of a wooden stock, as if he were wearing his heavy collar by way of joke. This small savage was a school-boy who had already run away from school four or five times and gone back to his village through the woods, with no fear of tigers. Not knowing how else to manage the little rascal, the court, after his last escapade, had severely declared, through the mouth of Y-thuop, that if ever he ran away again, he should have his head chopped off. This threat did not

deter him; he made off again, and here was a militiaman bringing him in, not in the least frightened and calmly nibbling a banana.

"Well," said the resident, staring hard at him, "you know to what you are condemned?"

"And why shouldn't I know?" answered the young savage, unmoved.

"Y-dam! Sharpen your chopper."

All the Mois about remained watching, open-mouthed. Without relinquishing his banana and with the same proud tone, the little vagabond, as he watched the militiaman approaching, said to the "grandfather":

"But if you cut my head off here, it will make a mess over everything. It would be better to go do it in the garden."

The three judges and the *ays* were nonplussed. I have forgotten with what new threat the boy was sent back to his class—that of throwing him into a tiger-pit, I think—but I am quite sure that he did not long continue the study of arithmetic and physics. For those stark-naked youngsters are taught physics, and those who are inattentive have to recite the four rules with their necks in stocks.

Everything is judged on the veranda. We are in turn justice of the peace and court of assizes,

and sentences are passed with equal facility imposing a fine of six hens or five years of imprisonment. Surprising problems arise. I-blo, nicknamed Long-legs, lost his wife, for instance; her parents gave him as a substitute wife their youngest daughter, a girl who had not yet attained puberty. I-blo had no objection and accepted her, but he took unto himself a concubine. Is he guilty?

Y-thuop laughs immoderately. Ma-bli, his face a study in mockery, ventures some sallies that the Mois receive with cries of joy, whinnying like their little horses. The two judges jestingly ask questions. The little substitute has her say in a shrill voice. Then it is the turn of the concubine, impassive as a buffalo-cow, chewing as if she were ruminating. The parents grow excited, and everybody talks at once and hurls insults at the favorite. Long-legs seems to be anxiously wondering whether or not he is going to have to sleep in prison.

The old hunter does not find the situation amusing. He laughs at neither the child wife nor the concubine and looks severely at the parents, who, for the sake of preserving their gongs and jars, arranged this stupid marriage. Ma-ngay reflects for a moment. His betel is transferred to the

other cheek. He is trying to remember. At last he clears his throat, throws out his hand with wide-spread fingers, and, hammering out certain words, recites:

Child daughter, virgin daughter, girl whose breasts are not yet full, girl yet ignorant of what girls and boys do;

Head where scissors pass, teeth not yet filed, girl that has not learned to perform the work of the house;

Child that still plays, digging in the earth, that clings to the ladder in climbing up;

Child that has never left its parents' shadow, that is carried in wrappings, that is not left alone for one instant . . .

If some one takes her for wife, he shall wait until the child becomes a young girl; he shall wait; for she knows not how to serve the rice, how to offer tobacco and betel, how to give satisfaction to a man;

But just as rounded and flat gongs are assembled for the harmony of sound, similarly the parents have matched those going together to cut the bamboos and to lay traps round the field.

The parents have arranged it thus, and the little sister follows and the mother precedes her.

Then if the husband has his feet on the road and his hand in the woods, if he steals love elsewhere, desires the caresses of another woman, a case cannot be brought against him;

For the reason that his wife is a slow tortoise, an infant on the knees of its mother.

The parents had no copper bracelets to procure a Bih; they did not want to give anything to secure a Mnong. They settled it like this, the little sister following her mother, because there was no one to throw light on their path, to provide them with food and with drink.

Therefore, no case can be brought.

I could doubtless, with the pretext of rendering it more intelligible, weigh down each metaphor with foot-notes. But I prefer to keep intact all the mystery. I do not care for flowers in a conservatory.

What does our code have to add to the *Bidoué?* Crimes, delinquencies, offenses, all are to be found there, even to the forsaking of a sick servant, to the excessive profits of a merchant, the transmission of contagious diseases. Have our laws of civilization considered these?

Cursed year, burning summer! The spirit of heaven is angry.

He whom heaven has struck, he upon whom heaven has inflicted a grievous sickness,

If he does not isolate himself, if he does not forbid others to come near him, if, like the elephant in the jungle, rubbing against the trees, like the crocodile

crawling in the rushes, he mingles with the inhabitants of the village,

Then robust men die, the strong fall, rich and able men give up their souls:

Thus the account is against him.

I did not grow weary of listening. I wanted to know and translate all of it. Ridiculous associations set themselves up in my mind between the *Bidoué* and the Napoleonic Code. What lawyer would dare designate as "conjugal domicile" one of those long houses on piles, with quarters of buffaloes dripping blood in front of the door?

I was astonished never to find the judges hesitating. Either Y-thuop, laughing, would pronounce the sentence, or Ma-bli, all cunning, would settle the debate, or Ma-ngay, harsh and solemn, recalled the law; but never were they at a loss. It has foreseen everything, that law of savages! Originated by primitive men who have no understanding of tears except for pain, by barbarians nourished on the entrails of buffaloes and fierce hunters who defy the tiger, lance in hand, that law is more generous to woman than are any other laws in the world. It is always the weakest that it defends.

They were united without bracelet.

Because they desired each other, as he who sees a pig desires meat, as he who sees a jar wishes to drink its intoxicating liquor.

No one tightened the traces of the horse. No one passed a rope round the neck of the buffalo. The parents of the girl were not seen soliciting the parents of the boy.

They remained together thus till the yam pushed its way through the earth, till the points of her breasts had darkened, till a child was born.

Now that he no longer loves her, because one morning she was lazy, the man ceases to live with the woman of one day.

He abandons her without cause, as the water disappears from the spring in the dry season.

Therefore he is guilty, and the account rests against him.

I listened and I wrote, not feeling the midday heat burning the nape of my neck.

At last Y-thuop rose and sent the complainants back home, and the condemned, to prison; and Ma-ngay, heavily descending the steps, again mounted his little horse. He put on a queer braided hat, large and round like a platter. He threw his blanket across the saddle and cast an indifferent look at the assembled rabble.

I shall never forget that barbaric judge, disappearing in the distance under the palms of the avenue, his feet dragging in the red ocher of Darlac.

Noise, music, sun, dust, feasting. There is a fête on at Ban-don, village of the tribe of elephant-hunters. A herd of thirty animals has been seen between Ban-tur and the great lake, and the men are about to start off in pursuit. The hunting-elephants are ready. The *pakams* have chosen their helpers. The equipment is tied. Nothing remains but to offer the sacrifices, the great invocation to Ngoet-ngoual. Afterward they will all vanish into the forest.

Around the house swarm the gong-players, the elephant-drivers, the meat-cutters with their hands smeared with blood. The women are wearing new scarfs, aprons of every color. A few have attached false strands to their hair, amusingly called "children of the hair-knot." And they have tinkling bracelets up to the elbows.

Buffalo heads, pieces of chopped meat, and haunches with the hair still on are piled up under coverings of foliage. All along the veranda hang greenish entrails, which will be eaten almost raw, bladders distended with one knows not what,

chaplets of reddish sausages, bleeding hearts. In an enormous kettle, boiled meat is steaming. Old women on all fours blow the embers, and little boys come running with water in a bamboo.

Here in another place are the musicians that I heard from the other end of the village. Some are wearing out their lungs blowing into buffalo-horns; others have rustic flutes of piercing tone. The big tom-tom is being thumped; and cymbals are clashing. The men have been drinking since morning and are worked up to a high pitch of excitement. I enter one of the houses by means of the notched bamboo that serves as a ladder. It is impossible to see anything. Smoke stings the eyes. I can barely make out men squatting in a circle round the hearth, puffing at long pipes with copper bowls. Seated on the trunk of a tree for a stool, I am made to drink from the jar. In my honor, the bamboo is washed—in what water, and with what hands! Happily it is dark. But there is no way of cheating; my squatting host watches the descending level of the rice-wine in the jar and refills it accordingly with his gourd. Knowing the custom, I spit out the first mouthful, and then I drink long drafts. It is warm and slightly sour. After me, the women contend for the bamboos and suck greedily.

Everywhere there is blood; in the bowls, on the bamboo partitions, on the bodies of the men—buffalo blood, thick and dark. A great red pool, which gives the hut the air of a slaughter-house, runs off drop by drop between the floor-sticks. The din of gongs and tom-toms and the ear-splitting noise of horns make the atmosphere still more barbaric. Suddenly I seem less like a traveler than a captive. In a corner women are prinking. They laugh and scuffle. One old one who looks like a witch begins to dance in front of the hearth. Long strings of beads hang from her arms, like wings; with the rest of her body motionless, she beats the air, in heavy flight. Then tossing her thin arms and throwing back her chest, she seems to be fighting off phantoms.

From outside come sounds of yelling and screaming, and I hasten forth to see what is happening. Little long-haired horses are racing up at full gallop, lashed by riders dimly seen in a cloud of dust. These races are greeted with howls. Behind, with slow processional step, follow the ponderous elephants, trunks hanging down. Quickly I descend and mingle with the multitude. The men and women are carrying their baskets on their backs as usual. What on earth do these contain? Whatever it is, it stinks.

They laugh, jostle one another, call out to the elephant-drivers.

The drivers are equipped and ready, with their heavy knives fastened at their sides, their hair knotted low, and their pipes stuck into their hair. The hunter who sits on the head of the elephant wears a jacket, but the one behind, a novice, is permitted to wear nothing but a sash; his blanket is only for use at night.

The elephants are known and called by name: Y-hien, Knock-kneed One; Y-Oue, Crooked Tail. These peaceable monsters are driven more easily than is a horse, simply by pressure of the knees, a click of the tongue. There is not a ten-year-old Mnong who cannot drive an elephant.

The huts empty themselves. Families gather excitedly and set up a clamoring on the verandas. The grumbling gongs clash louder. The garbage is now being cut up amid yells. Enormous fellows arrive in a procession, carrying buffalo heads with great horns, dripping with blood, like trophies. The noise never stops; the dust does not even have time to settle. Men, beasts, things —the sun roast them all in its great baker's oven.

Here is Khunjonob, attended by a yowling, skipping escort. The gong-players march along with the crowd. Dominating the confusion is a mag-

nificent white elephant, destined to be sold to the Siamese. To tell the truth, it is not so very white; pinkish rather, like a young pig; that is precisely the color. Since that occasion, white elephants have seemed less sacred to me.

The old Mnong chief, alert and crafty of face, is wearing his best outfit—*sampot* of silk and white jacket with a gold-embroidered collar. Formerly he condescended to go around naked like the others, a strip of cotton cloth thrown over his shoulders, but recently he was presented with the decoration of the Legion of Honor, and in order to have something to pin his cross to he had made for himself at Saigon this magnificent jacket that he never wants to take off any more. His brother, who follows him, watches with jealous eyes. Is it the cross or the jacket he envies him?

When the procession breaks up, the participants cross the village, the horses in the lead, to the house where the sacrifice is to be held. The veranda resembles a butcher's stall with all this red meat piled up on it and hanging underneath. The music grows louder than ever. The horn-blowers have found their breath again, and the cymbalist stiffens his arms. Khunjonob makes his way into the midst of the uproar, followed

by the great *pakams,* and the drivers lead up the first elephants. As I pat their warm trunks, I remark the funny sparse hairs which give them the look of old men.

The candles are now lighted. Pairs of horns decorate the house. There are bowls of blood and jars of intoxicating drink standing about. The effect, in the end, is of a primitive altar, a cage in a menagerie. Tired and perspiring, I climb up, jostling with the crowd. I climb up to watch the preparations and then climb down again. I get in the way of those who are officiating, dragging along quarters of buffalo; I enter the house and examine the candles that have fascinated me. Then once more tumbling down by the notched bamboo, I plant myself in the front row to see the parade. I keep moving about, but I am more excited than happy. My khaki costume, my helmet, my darkened glasses, trouble me. I find them incongruous. I should like for a moment to cease to be myself, to be nothing in this seething crowd but a yelling native. To a European, with a camera that can measure the hundredth part of a second, all this takes on the air of a theatrical performance.

Other elephants have arrived, and now there are more than forty, standing immobile as gray

rocks in the middle of the throng. Five are in line against the veranda, their heads touching it. Each one has on his back a package containing women's garments, the finest that could be found, to bring good luck.

The racket diminishes, and the sacrifice begins at last. The *pakams*, who have been pressing raw meat between the palms of their hands, now range themselves on the right of the veranda and begin chanting. This is the invocation to Ngoet-ngoual, chief of the guardian spirits of wild elephants.

Khunjonob's ancestors in ancient times signed an agreement with this god of the jungle. "Let us capture all the elephants we need, and we swear never to kill a single one among them." Ngoet-ngoual consented and in sign of accord gave to the chief of the Mnongs this copper bracelet and these two round stones—two lumps of elephant-dung. They have ever since been transmitted from father to son, and Khunjonob, last in line, preserves them carefully in a silk handkerchief. As for the hunters, they have kept their word: they capture, but they do not kill.

A certain old shriveled-up *pakam,* whose buffoon face pleases me and who greets me at each encounter with joyful shouts, has assumed an

austere look that I did not believe possible in him. Stiffly he holds in his thin hands a copper bowl, filled with rice, in which a lighted candle has been set. While continuing to pray, the other hunters approach and take a pinch of rice, which they throw on the flame. No one speaks; no one moves. Open-mouthed, the Mnongs look on, and the *pakams* lean over the little candle with beating hearts. The more grains stick to the candle the better will be the hunt. They count, close up, noses in the flame. All at once they straighten up, uttering loud cries, and the crowd responds with its clamor: the omen has been favorable.

Reassured, the hunters again paw their meat. To begin with, the elephant-drivers are handed a freshly cut buffalo head, which they lay against the foreheads of their elephants. Then from the platters the old *pakam* fills his hands to overflowing with chopped meat and cooked rice, which he proceeds to plaster on the head of each animal, all the while continuing his invocations. Quickly the elephant-drivers smear the foreheads of their mounts with this red mess, and the elephants now look as if they had been mortally wounded, with blood streaming all the way down their trunks. But they lend themselves to the whole ceremony without moving. They are accustomed to it.

When the oldest of the great *pakams* takes the jar of spirits reddened with chicken-blood to pour over each animal, some of the great sly beasts, for whom this is not the first hunt nor the first libation, open their huge soft mouths, preferring to have it poured in. Others curve their trunks to drink out of the jar itself. At the end of the sacrifice some of them may be seen walking more heavily than usual and finally falling asleep, leaning against a tree, dull of eye, knees giving way, dead drunk.

Of the whole ceremony, this is the part that entertains the Mois the most. When the old *pakam* is obliged to withdraw the jar from Crooked Tail, who would drain all the contents if allowed to, they utter ear-splitting cries, and they noisily cheer the first hunter who steers his big tippler back to the inclosure by pressing an ear with his bare foot.

After the first five elephants, five others are led up, and always the same throng is there "yowling" in the dust. Fresh jars, with candles stuck round them, are brought out. Other platters of meat are carried up, spilling over with the entrails. This goes on for hours, and the gongs never cease sounding as the elephants amble through the village and groups of Mnongs scat-

ter to make more racket in front of the various houses.

Some one surprises an assistant hunter in the act of skimming his rice as it boils in the pot, and everybody falls on him with alarming violence. To lift off scum from a kettle with a stick means that in the course of the hunt the branch of a tree will in like fashion scrape the back of an elephant and knock off his two drivers. The culprit must be punished at once and pardon asked of the guardian spirits. The helper—on these days he is prepared for any kind of rough treatment—allows himself to be dragged to the river. He is made to get into the water up to his neck, and then he is thoroughly splashed with a branch. The Moi women who have come running to the bank force him to duck his head under by throwing handfuls of sand at him.

"Crocodile!" they call out laughingly, as soon as he reappears, panting, with his hair all plastered down.

The old fellow who holds the branch yells above the noise, "Now that you are pardoned and while the spirit of Ngoet-ngoual is with you, tell us where he hides the elephants and how many there are."

"When you come in sight of Kettle Mountain,"

replies the drenched assistant, "there you will find three herds."

All begin shouting once more, and off they troop to carry the news to the others, followed by the assistant hunter, whom the sun has already dried.

The ceremony is still going on at the house of the sacrifice. The *pakams* are now making invocations on behalf of the equipment of each hunter—the roll of buffalo-hide cord, the long pole, the hook, the mallet, the buffalo-horn used for drinking, and the bamboo containing rice. Round each bundle little candles have been planted, and others burn on the jars as on so many little altars. Squatting on a mat, Khunjonob begins the last prayer. In a bowl full of spirits and blood he stirs the bracelet of Ngoet-ngoual and the two round pebbles, and the *pakams* murmur untranslatable responses in their hunting-language.

When the invocation is at an end, the stampede begins with a din of horns, tom-toms, cymbals, and gongs. The bamboo tubes have been placed in the jars; the feasting is about to begin. The Mois are exceedingly naïve. All the tribes give their feasts the same name, "much to drink." But what name would be any more appropriate?

Each takes his place, and while all are giving

way to the great *pakams,* who drink first, Khunjonob, in spite of his title, in spite of his cross, in spite of his white jacket and gold embroidery, goes to stand in line with the humble helpers, with the novices. He must wait his turn at the jar until after all the hunters have passed on ahead of him. His success in the chase has always been meager, and all the rest rank above him, from the *bak-siay,* who have already brought in five elephants, to the great *pakams,* who have captured more than a hundred. Does this subordination humiliate the brave old chief, fighter against the Laotians and the Ruongs for twenty years? Perhaps.

At a certain moment, one of his servants, a freed slave, runs up calling: "Chief! Chief!"

Last surprise of this unbelievable day—the resident is calling Khunjonob on the telephone! And he trots off, with the copper bracelet and the stones of Ngoet-ngoual rattling in his silk handkerchief.

Since the departure of the hunters, Ban-don is dead. They went off one morning in the direction of Ban-tur, where the water of the male and the female rivers join together. Like a formidable army they looked, with the sixty hunting-elephants and the noose-poles, like lances. Now there are

left in the village, besides the women and the old men, only those who cultivate the soil, the fishermen and the buffalo-herders.

Life is quite different now. There is less noise. Other customs come to the surface. It is forbidden for any one except the family to enter the house of a hunter. The women are forbidden to lend money, live stock, or anything else. Quarreling is forbidden, and the striking of animals. The Mnongs are well behaved and wary.

As long as the hunt lasts, the whole village must observe chastity, even the unpledged girls who have not exchanged bracelets. H'Bleuye was obliged to sacrifice two buffaloes a year ago when she bore the fruit of her fault a few months after the hunters returned. The spirits had to be appeased. The wife of a *pakam* received a young man in her hut at night-time. That same evening, the camp of the beaters was trampled by a rogue elephant, and three men were killed.

These superstitions and these customs paralyze the village. Everything is a possible annoyance to Ngoet-ngoual, even to the roasting of an eggplant or the dyeing of a scarf. The old women watch the young ones. I do not dare so much as to speak to H'Tse, who wears two ivory cylinders in her ears and laughs when we meet.

No more music, no more tom-toms. The return of the hunters is tremblingly awaited, as the Breton woman on the mole hopes for the return of the Newfoundland fisherman. Will the capture be a good one?

I wanted to know, and when word was brought in where the hunters had gone into camp, I went out to join them in the open forest beside the Krong Bonng. Evening came on. The woods were full of strange sounds, of the mysterious rustling of leaves; for an instant I stood filled with confusion, hesitating to shoot, before two luminous spots, two shining, phosphorescent eyes, caught in the light of my lantern. A stag, no doubt, which fled with a noise of trampled underbrush.

Several fires were lighted in the clearing. An armful of wood, reviving one of them, showed me all at once, for just the time of a leaping flame, the camp at rest—the heavy massing of animals, the hunters squatting in a circle and smoking, little shelters of bamboo low on the ground, with bare feet projecting. Then the flame died down, and I could see nothing but shadows enveloped in mist and smoke.

As yet they had captured only three elephants, separated from the herd, but the trackers had

picked up the trail of others, by breaks in the underbrush, fresh dung, and footprints in the soft earth of swamps; and they expected to overtake and run down the whole herd. Their voices seemed to me less strident in this solitude, their faces more grave, their gestures different. Everything was surrounded with mystery.

At the other end of the camp a fire went out. A bad omen, those ashes. We hurried over. The secondary hunters were contemplating the black logs with consternation. The watcher is supposed to keep the fires going all night, as a protection against wild animals. They might now have taken glowing embers from another fire, but no, custom forbids. Squatting round the dead fire, they waited in silence for the *pakam* to wake up and relight it, at the moment when Ngoet-ngoual should prompt him to open his eyes.

I stood up and took in the whole scene of the smokers of the calumet, sitting on the ground with their knees up to their chins, the sleeping hunters with a noose for a pillow. How far away from the world! It seems incredible that savages are still to be found anywhere!

Will the *pakam,* to relight his fire, rub bits of dry wood together, or will he strike sparks with two stones? Oh, no! He will use flint and steel

or perhaps even a match. I myself gave him a box just the other evening.

Getting off at dawn, we advance under cover, carrying our rifles. It is the season when the Mois light brush-fires, and constantly we come upon blackened clearings. Where the fire has passed, only a few large trees have survived, and here and there clumps of bamboos, like scorched rods. But a little farther along the fire burned itself out and the brush begins again, with its dry grass and its thickets in which the wild cocks call. Several times, without aiming, we fired at herds of deer for the mere pleasure of seeing them run and letting them know that the white man is dangerous.

"*Boh tao!*—The stone!" suddenly exclaimed the Radé who was guiding us.

An enormous smooth round rock shows us its armored sides; it is here that we are to take up our post. The air is luminous and soft. The forest is serene and tranquil as a game-preserve. Let us wait. Perhaps we shall see something.

Several times we strain our ears, thinking we have heard a sound. No, nothing. Two monkeys come by, giving each other a hand. A big parrot flies off, screaming things at us. Then abruptly we start up. This time they are really coming!

Far away there is a noise. It comes nearer. No voice, no cry, but heavy running that shakes the ground, a dull thumping, and soon we hear the crashing of broken branches. . . . If they only do not get wind of us, in spite of the quarter of carrion thrown out close at hand by one of the beaters . . . no, the noise comes straight toward us. Trumpeting resounds not far off. Where will the thicket part?

When these thoughts are whirling through my head, two hundred yards away the branches move and the pursued elephant suddenly appears. He is racing, trunk lifted. He is going to cut diagonally across the clearing, and once again he sounds his alarm-call. On the instant, another elephant comes out of the wood—much larger, this one, with but a single tusk. One beast follows the other, running ponderously. Young trees and bamboos bend and part like grass. It would seem that the stronger one, the male, is covering the flight of the little one; he trumpets again.

Two gray bulks, sinking into the thicket, and it is over—they have gone!

But the hunters are on their track. The thumping of the two fugitives has scarcely died away before the same noise is renewed; and at exactly the same spot, through the break where the leaves

are still trembling, a hunting-elephant looms up. A fleeting vision, lasting for the time of one breath: the crushing beast with its heavy tread; in front, leaning forward, the chief hunter with his pole thrust out and the noose ready; behind, clinging somehow all doubled up, the helper, who will let himself roll off at whatever cost the moment the chief has fastened the hobble, to tie the other end of the rope to a tree.

The elephant and the two men merge into a single unit. Not a word, not a cry, not even a look at us. They do not swerve from the track; straight into the thicket they pass. The branches crack. Nothing more but a glimpse of two bare backs on top of a vast gray hulk. A moment of panic comes to me as I think a low branch is about to sweep the two men off the back of the elephant, like the helper scraping his rice. But no, they have lain down. Another instant one can follow them among the trees. Then the noise dies away, and the brush closes in again. The hunters are already far ahead, at close quarters with the trumpeting beast.

I found them all again five days later, in the swamp of Ban-tur, the country of Queen Pomare. What humorous colonial bestowed this name upon the little Moi woman no taller than a gun?

She laughs, jests with ease, begs twenty cents, and, hanging on my arm, conducts me to the ferry by which one crosses the river. The elephants are on the other side.

The hunt is still on, and already twenty-seven have been captured, twenty-seven elephants of all ages and all sizes. They are to be seen in the distance here and there, coupled to those who caught them. Some are still furious and are pulling on their ropes, in spite of the spiked collar that holds them; others have quickly become resigned and are calmly pulling up the tender grass with their trunks and, before eating it, carefully shaking out the earth against one foot; a few, the worst ones, are still in the forest where they were caught, hobbled by the hind leg and with one end of the noose twisted round a tree. They will stay like this until they are tired out. To finish their training, two big hunting-elephants will be chosen, and these false brothers, on each side of the captive, will shake him until he has had enough.

I linger some time, amused, before the youngest elephant of the prisoner herd, a gay little fellow hardly taller than Pomare, whom his victor observes with a somewhat shamefaced air, punishing him from time to time, if he tries to stray, with a blow from foot or trunk.

My old *pakam,* whom I met once more, laughed before me in triumph. In the twenty-five years that he has been hunting, he has never come back to Ban-don without bringing prizes with him.

"Live to be as old as an elephant!" I wished him.

He looked at me with a surprised air. Why such a ridiculous wish? Do elephants live to be so old? Not at all; of all the elephants belonging to Khunjonob's mother, not one remains, and so far as Moi hunters can remember, not a single elephant has lived longer than a "very old man."

"Older than the elephant of Ngoet-ngoual," I corrected myself.

Then he gave a great shout, laughing with all his black teeth.

REGRETS

SHALL I ever return to the high plateau of the Mois? Theirs is a far-off land.

I see an immense stretch of water scooped and lifted by waves, ships growing larger, saluting us with sirens and passing on, vague coasts, happy landings, the unforgettable charm of evenings on board. Then come Saigon and its coal-covered dock, and white helmets, Chettis dressed in curtain material, rickshaws and the stuffy little Nhatrang railway, with the "boy" arriving to set the table at noon. There are a night at the residency, the sea rocking me, the motor, the ferry, *nhos* running away, rice-fields, the sun and Ninh-hoa at last. Before the militia, the Radé chauffeur who is waiting for me, without trousers or shoes, announces in his newly acquired French:

"First, sir, I must take my repast."

Unforgettable memories, still the substance of my dreams.

Shall I ever again climb that tortuous road which gives the impression that it is seeking the

pass between the wood and the ravines? At the post of Mdrac, shall I find once more the long gray beard of the inspector, patriarch of the jungle? And the herds of deer watching us pass, and the monkeys making faces from the branches, and the twenty-seven wild elephants, which the hunters of Khunjonob brought back in fetters to the swamps of Ban-tur?

No, it is impossible to dream the same dream twice.

Midway in my life, I have lived through, in one breath, all the romantic tales of my childhood. I have been the "brother of the paleface," greeted with shouts by tribesmen bristling with lances. I have known tracking in the forest, the night-watch, noisy conferences, and on the porches of the houses, girls with bare breasts singing as they crushed the rice. All this is so strange that sometimes I doubt its reality, as I doubt, upon waking, the events of the past day, mingled as they are with figments of dream.

Eyes closed, I enter upon the road of other days, and suddenly I see again, near the big lake, a Mnong mountain village, which took me by surprise one morning, on account of its dead look, its immobility, its silence.

Why does that mysterious village come back to

me, that particular one? Because it stands as a symbol. In the throes of an epidemic, that village had made itself *kam,* had isolated itself, as indicated by the fetters and stocks suspended from the gateway of bamboo; until the next moon no one might enter here. No cries; for noise would carry the evil afar. No fires; for smoke would attract the bad spirit.

Curiosity arrested me on the road, and I noticed, in front of certain huts, a kind of rustic tripod on which a bowl of cooked rice had been placed. My guide explained that this was to keep away the contagion. The greedy *yang* would throw himself on the rice and would go no farther.

So it is that when my thoughts turn back to the poor Moi country destined to perish, I see again, close to the trembling lake where slender canoes were gliding, this silent village of the cold hearths, and I dream of a magic hand placing on the hill of Mdrac or on the road to Kon-tum a great bowl of boiled rice, to hold back the greedy spirits.